



**INDIAN PHILOSOPHY**

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## Course Introduction

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This course outlines the fundamentals of ancient Indian philosophy. The course covers the basic concepts of the nine schools of Indian philosophy while also delving into various *Upaniṣads* along with their detailed philosophical explanations. This course is essential as it lays a background for further philosophical studies and also serves as an introductory overview to studies in metaphysics and epistemology. The objective of this core course is to introduce Indian philosophy from various thematic contexts and also build on basic concepts and their analysis in Philosophy.

The term *darśan* or Indian philosophy broadly may refer to any of the several traditions of philosophical thought that originated in the Indian subcontinent: Hindu philosophy, Buddhist philosophy, Jain philosophy, and Tribal and Dalit Philosophy. Having the same or rather intertwined origins, all of these philosophies have a common underlying theme of world vision, and similarly attempt to explain metaphysics, primarily through their ideas on attainment of truth and liberation. The characteristic of these philosophies is that they may belong to one “school” and disagree with each other, like in the case of Dvaita (dual) and Advaita (non-dual) schools being a part of the same tradition yet differing in their outlook or the non-Vedic Jaina school and the Vedic Sāṅkhya school, both of which have similar ideas on pluralism yet are two completely independent schools.

The BA General Philosophy Course is designed for you to have a holistic understanding of the basics of the discipline of Philosophy. The first course is BPYC-131: Indian Philosophy which covers the fundamentals of ancient Indian philosophy which ranged from the philosophy of the *Vedas* to unorthodox philosophies like that of the Cārvāka and Buddhist systems. There are 22 units in Indian Philosophy course, which are divided into 5 blocks. The first block titled Introduction to Indian Philosophy is an entry point into Indian Philosophy as it first introduces the basic concepts and then delves into how the ancient Indian scriptures form the backbone of the discipline. The first block is divided into four units. This block helps you to understand the differences between Western and Indian philosophical traditions, and the aims of philosophy differently perceived by the Western and Indian thinkers. This block forms a sort of background study which should enable you to form a proper perspective of Indian thought. This block looks at the basic questions raised in Indian metaphysics like the perspectives on reality and the scope of life (including liberation); it also looks at the modes of answering such questions or the breadth of epistemology in the context of Indian philosophical thought. One of the units of this block is on Indian Scriptures. In this unit, you are exposed to the sources of Indian culture. However, the study material excludes prominent texts like *Vedas* (also called *Sruti*) and scriptures of Buddhism and Jainism. Since, there are other units reserved for these sources. This unit, therefore, includes only the following; *Smṛti*, mythology, vedangas and epics. The relevance of Indian scripture in Philosophy takes us to the unit named “Philosophy of the Epics”. In the ancient Indian tradition, there are three main texts that Hindu religion and philosophy rely on: the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, and the *Bhagavad Gīta* along with other texts. There is a deep rooted relationship between philosophy and literature — and many aspects of the Hindu moral philosophy like that of the *Puruṣārthas*, goals of liberation, theory of karma and so on — are influenced by ancient

Indian literature. This block also introduces the difference between the different systems of Indian philosophy and broadly categorizes them into the orthodox (Āstika) schools and the heterodox (Nāstika) schools, this distinction is based on the fact that some schools uphold the authority of the *Vedas*, those schools are classified as the orthodox school, and those that do not endorse the authority of the *Vedas* are heterodox schools. The systems of Cārvāka, Buddhism and Jainism are the heterodox schools; and the Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Mīmāṃsaka, Advaita Vedānta, Viśiṣṭādvaita are the orthodox schools.

The subject-matter of Block 2 and 3 is the *Upaniṣads*. The *Upaniṣads* are Hindu scriptures that constitute the core teachings of Vedānta (etymologically: the end of the *Vedas*). They do not belong to any particular period of Sanskrit literature: the oldest, such as the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and *Chāndogya Upaniṣads*, date to the late *Brāhmaṇa* period (around the middle of the first millennium BCE), while the latest were composed in the medieval and early modern period. The *Upaniṣads* have exerted an important influence on the rest of Indian Philosophy, and were collectively considered one of the 100 most influential books ever written by the British poet Martin Seymour-Smith. The philosopher and commentator Śaṅkara is thought to have composed commentaries on eleven mukhya or principal *Upaniṣads*, those that are generally regarded as the oldest, spanning the late Vedic and Mauryan periods. Vedānta philosophy has many interpretations to it as seen in the Advaita (non-dual) tradition, the Dvaita (dual), the Viśiṣṭādvaita (qualified non-duality) interpretations through various philosophers. The block 2, titled Upanishadic Philosophy: Core Themes-I introduces the philosophy of Vedānta, and looks at the discussion on the three paths to liberation as mentioned in the *Upaniṣads*, the theory of karma, the importance of teleology which eventually shapes the theories of morality for all Indian philosophical systems. The block also explains the philosophy of the *Praśna*, *Muṇḍaka* and *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*. This block would enable you to notice various philosophical and underpinnings of scientific issues which have found place in the *Upaniṣads*. In the end, you should be in a position to understand that philosophy is not merely an intellectual exercise in India, but it is also the guiding factor of human life.

The third block is titled Upanishadic Philosophy: Core Themes-II. This block includes some of the oldest *Upaniṣads* like the *Īśa*, *Chāndogya* and the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. In this block you will study philosophical theories and arguments of the *Īśa*, *Kaṭha*, *Chāndogya* and the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. Some of the discussion points of these *Upaniṣads* are,

The *Īśa Upaniṣad* looks at the question of reconciling human and activity with the monistic standpoint of Advaita Vedānta. The “*Kaṭha Upaniṣad*” deals the questions of the end of human life. “What happens when one dies? Does everything end with death? What is it that survives death? The “*Chāndogya Upaniṣad*” explains the identity of Ātman and Brahman, it also explains Vedāntin cosmology and evolution of life. The “*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*” illustrates the all-embracing, absolute, self-luminous and blissful reality of Brahman recognized as Ātman.

The discussion-matter of Block 4 and 5 is Indian Philosophical systems (Schools). The systems of Indian philosophy are mainly divided into two groups: the heterodox (nāstika) and orthodox (āstika). Those systems of philosophy which do not accept the validity of *Veda* are called the heterodox systems or

nāstikas and those which accept the validity of *Veda* are called the orthodox systems or āstikas. Cārvāka, Jainism and Buddhism are nāstika or heterodox systems. The fourth block is on the Heterodox Systems, which includes four units. This block introduces Metaphysics, epistemology and ethics of Cārvaka, Jain and Buddhist Schools. In this block you will study the early Buddhism and also various schools of Buddhism. You will see the development of not only Buddhism, but also the glimpses of dialogical tradition of Indian Philosophy. How the various interpretations of one text or one teaching give birth of many philosophical positions. It is not only true for Buddhism, but also true for All Indian Philosophical systems.

The final block is on the Orthodox Systems which includes five units. All Indian philosophies can be seen to have a common theme of unity and diversity (advaita and dvaita) in their understanding and interpretation of reality, and attempt to explain the attainment of liberation (mokṣa). They had been formulated chiefly from 1,500 BC to a few centuries A.D, with critical investigations and creative ways of philosophically interpreting even socio-political-economic issues of existential importance continuing up to as late as the 21 century by Amartya Sen and others. The units of this block discuss metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, idea of God, salvation of Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṅkhya, Yoga, and Mīmāṃsā. This block also discusses various different views found in a school. Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Sāṅkhya- Yoga, Mīmāṃsā-Vedānta is considered as an allied system of Indian school of thought.

This block also discusses the philosophies of Vedānta schools and *Bhakti Sampradāya* (Bhakti Schools/cults). The literal meaning of the term Vedānta is “the end of the *Vedas*, the concluding parts of the *Vedas*, the culmination of the Vedic teaching and wisdom”. Thus the term is originally referred to the *Upaniṣads*, the last literary products of the Vedic period. The views of the *Upaniṣads* also constitute the final aim of the *Veda*, or the essence of the *Vedas*. However, Vedānta has subsequently come to include the various elaborations and interpretations of the *Upaniṣads*. Thus the *Upaniṣads* abound in terse and aphoristic statements replete with inspiring meanings. Scintillating significance and dynamic intuition are packed into such short and powerful utterances. Precisely for these reasons the *Upaniṣads* give rise to diverse interpretations. In course of time, there emerged different schools of Vedānta, the prominent ones being Advaita (non-dualism) of Śaṅkara, Viśiṣṭādvaita (Qualified Nondualism) of Rāmānuja and Dvaita (Dualism) of Madhva. Each of these is going to be explored in detail, in the units two, three and four of the block. The final unit is on Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism, which are two very popular forms of Hindu faith with large numbers of followers. Lord Śiva and Lord Viṣṇu are worshiped as Supreme Being respectively in these religious traditions. However, in popular Hinduism Śiva is one of the Trinity and carries on the function of Annihilation, while Brahmā and Viṣṇu are said to be the Gods of creation and sustenance respectively. Both Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism have diversified religious beliefs and practices. Various sects of them are found all over India. They are considered to be very ancient faiths in India. There are few direct and indirect references to these gods in the *Vedas* too. Nevertheless Vedic understanding of Siva and Vishnu was not very much developed as to regard them as Supreme Being. As a result of medieval bhakti movements these religious traditions have witnessed a development both in the religious sphere and in the philosophical sphere.

## Diacritical Marks

A diacritical mark is a symbol that tells us how to pronounce a word. Generally whenever we write a word from a language in roman script we use diacritical marks to convey the exact pronunciation. In line with this academic practice this study material also makes use of diacritical marks wherever words from Sanskrit language are mentioned.

## Vowels

| Devanāgarī | Transcription |      | Category                             |
|------------|---------------|------|--------------------------------------|
| अ          | A             | A    | monophthongs<br>and syllabic liquids |
| आ          | ā/â           | Ā/Ā  |                                      |
| इ          | I             | I    |                                      |
| ई          | ī/î           | Ī/Ī  |                                      |
| उ          | U             | U    |                                      |
| ऊ          | ū/û           | Ū/Ū  |                                      |
| ऋ          | r             | R    |                                      |
| ॠ          | ṛ             | Ṛ    |                                      |
| ऌ          | l             | L    |                                      |
| ॡ          | ḷ             | Ḹ    |                                      |
| ए          | E             | E    | diphthongs                           |
| ऐ          | Ai            | Ai   |                                      |
| ओ          | O             | O    |                                      |
| औ          | Au            | Au   | anusvara                             |
| ·          | m/n̄          | M/N̄ |                                      |
| :          | ḥ             | Ḥ    | visarga                              |
| ◌̣         | ~             |      | chandrabindu                         |
| s          | ‘             |      | avagraha                             |

| Consonants |            |             |            |            |                      |
|------------|------------|-------------|------------|------------|----------------------|
| velars     | palatals   | retroflexes | dentals    | labials    | Category             |
| क<br>k K   | च<br>c C   | ट<br>ṭ Ṭ    | त<br>t T   | प<br>p P   | tenuis stops         |
| ख<br>kh Kh | छ<br>ch Ch | ठ<br>ṭh Ṭh  | थ<br>th Th | फ<br>ph Ph | aspirated stops      |
| ग<br>g G   | ज<br>j J   | ड<br>ḍ Ḍ    | द<br>d D   | ब<br>b B   | voiced stops         |
| घ<br>gh Gh | झ<br>jh Jh | ढ<br>ḍh Ḍh  | ध<br>dh Dh | भ<br>bh Bh | breathy-voiced stops |
| ङ<br>ṅ Ṇ   | ञ<br>ñ Ñ   | ण<br>ṇ Ṇ    | न<br>n N   | म<br>m M   | nasal stops          |
| ह<br>h H   | य<br>y Y   | र<br>r R    | ल<br>l L   | व<br>v V   | approximants         |
|            | श<br>ś Ś   | ष<br>ṣ Ṣ    | स<br>s S   |            | sibilants            |
|            | क्ष्<br>Kṣ | त्र्<br>Tr  | ज्ञ्<br>Jñ |            |                      |



**Block 1**

**INTRODUCTION  
TO  
INDIAN PHILOSOPHY**

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## Block Introduction

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Block 1 attempts to outline general characteristics of Indian Philosophy by introducing Indian Philosophical Traditions. For this, in this unit an attempt has been made to show the philosophical role of *Vedas*, *Upaniṣads*, *Purāṇas*, and *Mahākāvya*, so that learner could not only understand historical but also philosophical origin of Indian Philosophical systems.

**Unit 1** ‘An Outline of Indian Philosophy’, of this block attempts to explain, with the help of central characteristics of Indian Philosophy, is there any fundamental difference between Indian and Western traditions, if yes, then what are those differences, along with this, it also addresses the questions of what is philosophy, what is ultimate reality? Etc. It also discusses some fundamental Indian thesis like *Puruṣārthas*, *Varṇāśrama* etc.

**Unit 2** ‘Indian Scriptures’ address the philosophical thoughts of *Vedāṅga*, *Smṛti*, *Purāṇas* etc. An attempt has been made in this unit to see how these texts play a role of Indian Philosophical systems. We also study *Smṛti* tradition and *Sūtra* tradition in this unit. With these, moral and political philosophy of the characters of *Mahābhārata*, Vidur and Bhishma, is also discussed in this unit. But an elaborated discussion of *Mahābhārata* and other *Mahākāvyas* has not been included in this unit because next unit is devoted to the philosophy of *Mahākāvyas* only.

**Unit 3** ‘Philosophy of the Epics’ is about the philosophy of *Mahākāvyas*. An attempt has been made to know the philosophical thoughts of *Ramāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata* and *Gīta*. The metaphysical, epistemological and ethical philosophies propounded by these *Mahākāvyas* have been discussed in this unit.

**Unit 4** ‘Nāstika and Āstika Darśana’ addresses the distinction of *āstika* (orthodox) and *nāstika* (heterodox) prevalent in Indian philosophical systems. Not only the distinction, this unit also tries to explain the grounds of this distinction in the Indian philosophical systems as well.



Block

# 1

## **INTRODUCTION TO INDIAN PHILOSOPHY**

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### **UNIT 1**

**An Outline of Indian Philosophy** **15**

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### **UNIT 4**

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# UNIT 1 AN OUTLINE OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY\*

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## Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Philosopher's Look at Reality
- 1.3 Knowledge in Indian Context
- 1.4 Philosophy and Life
- 1.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.6 Key Words
- 1.7 Suggested Readings and References
- 1.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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The main objectives of this unit are:

- To dispel certain misconceptions about Indian philosophy held mainly by western scholars and certain other misconceptions held by some Indian scholars. In order to grasp Indian philosophy in proper perspective, it is necessary that these misconceptions are erased;
- To distinguish philosophy from religion in the Indian context. This unit shows that, taken in the strict sense of the term, philosophy is not the same as religion. Some key philosophical issues developed in the Indian context are on very different lines as compared to western thought;
- To project the essence of Indian thought.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the Indian context, philosophy is taken to mean *Darśana* or *tattva*. Let's see how the etymological meaning of 'philosophy' correlates itself with *Darśana* or *tattva*. '*Drśyate anena iti darśanam*' translates as 'the one through which it is seen'. From a philosophical point of view, to 'see' means to 'realise'. *Darśana*, therefore, means to realise. Further, the verb "realise" is a transitive verb. Whenever we realise, we always realise 'something'. To say that we realise 'nothing' is to admit that there is no realisation at all. If we recollect whatever that was said about 'know', then it becomes clear that to a great extent 'to realise' corresponds to 'to know', and hence realisation corresponds to knowledge. This correspondence is nearly one-to-one; i.e., it is nearly isomorphic. This aspect shall unfold itself in due course.

Simultaneously, the word *tattva* is derived from two words '*tat*' and '*tva*'. *Tat* means 'it' or 'that' and *tva* means 'you'. Therefore *tattva*, etymologically, means 'you are that'. What is important is to know what *tat* stands for in Indian

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## Introduction to Indian Philosophy

thought. It means reality or ‘ultimate’ reality. This is also what one division of philosophy, i.e., metaphysics talks about. Now, since Darśana *is* about knowing reality, it involves not only an important metaphysical component but also an important epistemological component. Hence, the summation of these two components more or less satisfactorily completes the description of philosophy as Darśana in Indian context.

There is yet another component that remains to be understood. Obviously, ‘you’ (*tva*) stands for knower, i.e., the epistemological subject and by identifying the epistemological subject with reality, we arrive at an important corollary. Indian thought did not distinguish between reality and the person or epistemological subject and hence etymologically, knowledge in Indian thought became inward (however, it must be emphasized that it outgrew the etymological meaning in its nascent stage itself). But what is of critical importance is the philosophical significance of the above mentioned corollary. Wherever man is involved, directly or indirectly, value is involved, hence axiology surfaces. When man is identified with reality, it and the whole lot of issues related to reality gain value-overtones. Hence, in Indian context, value is not merely a subject matter of philosophy, but philosophy itself comes to be regarded as ‘value’. Consequently, the very approach of Indian thinkers to philosophy gains some distinct features.

### 1.2 PHILOSOPHER’S LOOK AT REALITY

Indian thought is essentially pluralistic as we understand through the exposition of reality. First, we can begin with types of reality and this can be done from two different angles.

Table 1:

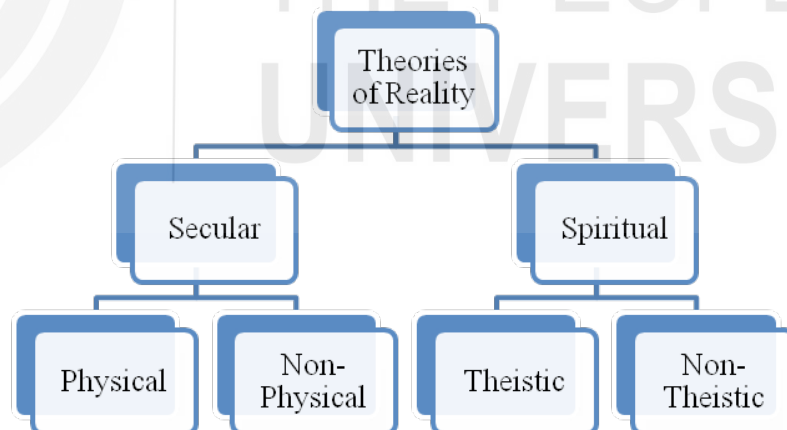
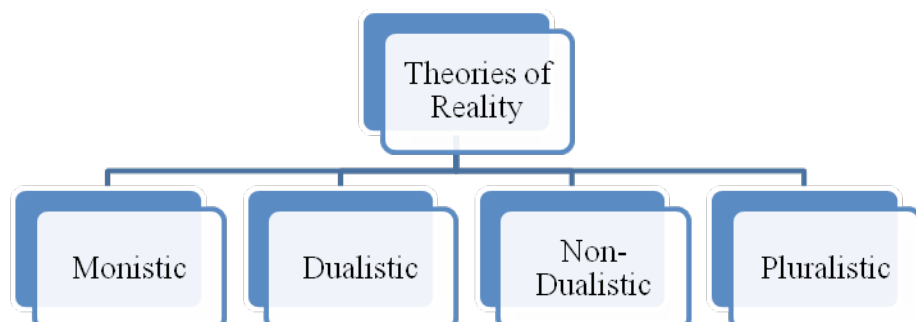


Table 2:



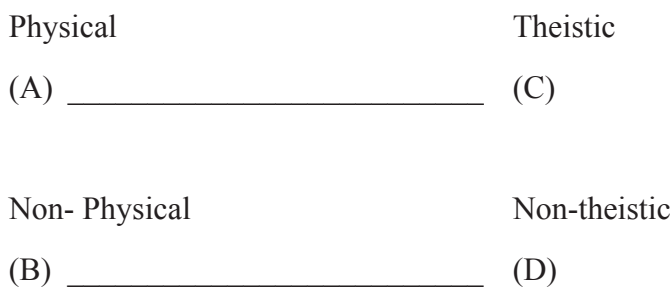


Let us try to understand what Table 1 says. But before doing so, it is better to answer the question; what is reality? Indeed, this is the most difficult question to answer. To start with: ‘reality’ can be defined as the one which is the ultimate source of everything and itself does not have any source. It also can be taken to mean that which is independent. This definition itself is hotly debated in philosophical circles. If we take this as a working definition of reality, then we find it to our surprise that ancient Indians offered various answers resulting in “proliferation of an ocean of theories”, to use Feyerabend’s phrase. Contrary to widespread belief that prevailed in the past, all Indian thinkers did not recognize reality as spiritual. Nor did they unanimously regard it as secular. A complex discipline like philosophy does not allow for such simple divisions. Surely, some thinkers accepted only spiritual reality and on the contrary, some other thinkers accepted only ‘secular’ reality. However, an upshot of this division was that thinkers in India neglected neither this world nor the ‘other’ (if it exists), and this is a significant aspect to be borne in mind.

Curiously, at Level 2, the divisions of secular and spiritual theories are mutually exclusive and totally exhaustive, i.e., physical and non-physical, on the one hand and theistic and non-theistic, on the other. Though within secular range (and similarly within spiritual range) the divisions exclude each other any division of secular theory can go with any division of spiritual theory without succumbing to self-contradiction. Accordingly, we arrive at four combinations which are as follows:

- |                 |   |              |
|-----------------|---|--------------|
| 1. Physical     | – | Theistic     |
| 2. Physical     | – | Non-Theistic |
| 3. Non-Physical | – | Theistic     |
| 4. Non-Physical | – | Non-Theistic |

Now let us delve into the meaning of these terms. A theory which regards the independence of the physical world is physical. Likewise, a theory which regards the independence of any other substance than the physical world is non-physical. The former need not be non-theistic. A theory of reality can accord equal status to this world and god. Surely, it does not involve any self-contradiction. The *Dvaita* and the *Vaiśeṣika* illustrate the former, whereas *Cārvāka* (Physical- Non theistic) illustrates the latter. A diagram illustrates the point.



What is to be noted here is that A and B lack connectivity; and so also C and D. In western tradition, the term ‘mind’ replaces the term non-physical. However, in Indian context such usage is inaccurate because, at least, some schools regard mind as a sixth organ. The *Sāṅkhya* is one school which regards the mind as an evolute of *prakṛiti* (creation). Hence, it is as much physical as any other

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Indian Philosophy**

sense organ. The Vaiśeṣika is another school which has to be bracketed with the Sāṅkhya in this regard. At this stage, we should get ourselves introduced to two key metaphysical terms, realism and idealism; the former with all its variants regards the external world as ultimately real, whereas the latter with all its variants regards external world as a derivative of mind. Of course, here mind is not to be construed as a sixth organ. The Yogācāra, a later Buddhistic school is one system which subscribes to idealism.

Now it is clear that (A) and (B) are mutually exclusive and totally exhaustive. Under D (Non-theistic) there are two sub-divisions; atheistic and agnostic. C (Theistic) on the one hand, and atheistic and agnostic on the other hand are mutually exclusive and totally exhaustive. Since, atheistic and agnostic doctrines are philosophically different, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> types are further split into two each. So, instead of 4, we will have six theories. Each theory differs from every other theory. The differences are, sometimes gross and sometimes subtle. It is, now, more than obvious that Indian philosophy does not lend itself to simple and easy categorization. Complexity and variety must be regarded as salient features of Indian thought. This aspect is further compounded when table 1 and table 2 intersect. Before considering such an intersection we should first elucidate table 2.

Table 2 explicates theories of reality and distinguishes theories on the basis of number, i.e., the number of substances, which are regarded as real, becomes the criterion to make any distinction. Monism asserts that reality is one. The assertions of dualistic and pluralistic theories can be ascertained without difficulty, since they stand for ‘two’ and ‘more than two’ respectively. Non-dualistic theory, i.e., The *Advaita* is unique. It does not make any assertion about numbers, but only negates dualism (if dualism is inadmissible, then pluralism is also inadmissible). The *Upaniṣads* are monistic and The Vaiśeṣika is pluralistic.

Now we shall integrate table 1 and table 2. An integration of this sort yields in all twenty four systems. This is not to imply that twenty-four systems dominated the scene. But the majority of them did flourish at one time or another. Consideration of questions in respect of reality should make it clear that no qualitative difference can be discerned between the Indian and the western traditions. Questions are alike; because problems are alike. But the same set of questions may elicit different answers from different minds at different times and places. Always, *spatio-temporal* factor play a major role in determining solutions. The last aspect becomes clear after we consider issues in respect of knowledge.

**Check Your Progress I**

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer  
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. What is the meaning of the term ‘Darśana’?

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2. Define Darśana in Indian Philosophical Context.
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### 1.3 KNOWLEDGE IN INDIAN CONTEXT

Desire is not an extraordinary quality of man. This is an instinct which can be discerned in any animal. However, human beings have a very powerful desire to know. The extent of knowledge acquired or capable of being acquired varies from species to species. This is one difference. Second, human's motive to acquire knowledge and their concept of knowledge differ from culture to culture, thus the concept of knowledge is relative to culture. The essence of philosophy consists in these two principal factors; motive and idea.

Indian and western concepts, whether ancient or modern, are best understood when they are compared and contrasted. Ancient Greeks believed in the principle 'knowledge for the sake of knowledge', which gave impetus to birth and growth of pure science. In contrast, the post-renaissance age heralded the contrary principle 'knowledge is power'. This dictum propagated by Bacon changed forever the very direction of the evolution of science. However, ancient Indians exhibited a very different mindset. While medicine and surgery developed to meet practical needs, astronomy and mathematics developed for unique reasons, neither purely spiritual nor purely mundane, in order to perform *yajñas* to meet practical ends and *yajñas* to achieve spiritual gain. At any rate, ancient Indians never believed in the Greek dictum. Nor did they, perhaps, think of it. If we regard knowledge as value, then we have to conclude that it was never regarded as intrinsic. On the other hand, it was mainly instrumental. The only exception to this characterization is the Cārvāka system which can be regarded as the Indian counterpart of Epicureanism.

In a restricted sense, the Indian philosophy of knowledge comes very close to the Baconian philosophy of knowledge. Truly, Indians regarded knowledge as power because for them knowledge (and thereby, philosophy) was a way of life and was never intrinsic. But, then, it is absolutely necessary to reverse the connotation of the word 'power'. While the Baconian 'power' was meant to experience control over nature, the Indian 'power' was supposed to be the instrument to subjugate one's own self to nature. This is the prime principle which forms the cornerstone of early *Vedic* thought. This radical change in the meaning of the word 'power' also explains the difference in world view which can be easily discerned when the belief-systems and attitudes of Indians and Europeans (for our purpose 'west' means Europe only) are compared and contrasted. Post-Baconian Europe believed that this universe and everything in it is meant to serve the purpose of man because man is the centre of the universe. (The spark of this thought did characterize a certain phase in the

## Introduction to Indian Philosophy

development of *Vedic* thought, only to be denounced at later stages). On the other hand, ancient Indian philosophers believed in identifying themselves with nature. For the western thinkers, knowledge was not only 'power' but became a powerful weapon to address their economic and political agenda. At no point in time did they look upon knowledge as a means to achieve anything even remotely connected to a spiritual goal. Just as the Cārvāka is an exception in Indian context, Socrates and Spinoza can be regarded as exceptions in western context. Most Indian philosophers did not regard worldly pleasure as ultimate. For them there was something more important and enduring and therefore the conquest of nature was never a goal. Precisely, this attitude has generated a lot of needless controversy. This characterization, which, no doubt, is true, was grossly misunderstood and, consequently, it was argued that the Indian thought rejects altogether this world and presents life as totally irrelevant and insignificant. This argument, which stems from total misunderstanding, is altogether unwarranted. To say that x is more important than y is not to say that y is insignificant. If something is more important, then it means that something else is 'less' important. In other words, Indian tradition, surely, includes the 'present' life, but it is not restricted to it only rather goes beyond it.

Evidently, Indian tradition maintains a certain hierarchy of values. Knowledge, as a way of life, encompasses not only all sorts of values but also it changes one's own perspective. Accordingly, the so-called spiritual goal in life can be attained only by one who has acquired knowledge of the truth. It points to the fact that ignorance or *Avidyā* is a hindrance to attain spiritual goals in particular and any other goal in general. One who has acquired true knowledge or knows truly, acts and thinks, very differently, different from ignorant, a characteristic Socratic thought in Indian attire. However, this characteristic is conspicuous by its absence in western tradition. In this context, while Socrates and Spinoza are at one end of the thread, Bacon and Heidegger are at the opposite end. The point is that in Indian tradition, philosophy and value are inseparable, whereas in the west it is not necessarily so.

This sort of emphasis upon values led to a hermeneutic blunder. Consequently, many western thinkers argued that Indian philosophy was never distinct from religion. Hence, according to critics, in India there was no philosophy at all worth the name, that there was no religion in India (with the exclusion of tribal religion). However, the so-called *Hindu dharma* cannot be mistaken and ought not to be mistaken for religion. This confusion arose because many scholars mistakenly identified religion with spirituality. An analogy may clear the mist surrounding Indian philosophy. Western philosophy is not divided into Christian philosophy and Jewish philosophy, though all western philosophers (excluding Greek philosophers) in loose sense are either Christians or Jews. Likewise, it is highly inappropriate to talk about '*Hindu philosophy*', though majority of Indian philosophers were *Hindus*. It is true that a few philosophers in India became the heads of religious groups or sects (eg. Rāmānuja or Madhva). But then there are medieval philosophers like St. Augustine, St. Aquinas, etc. in the west also. But surely, we have Buddhist or Jaina philosophy because neither Buddhism or Jainism is a religion in the strict sense of the term. At this point, a pertinent question arises, if there is Buddhist philosophy, then why not Hindu philosophy? To believe that there is such philosophy amounts to putting the cart in front of the horse. Philosophy in India did not originate from *Sanātana*

*dharma* — or Hindu *dharma* as it is popularly known as — but it is rather the other way round.

Therefore, in sharp contrast to western tradition, Indian philosophy can be spiritually oriented. The concept of reality and aesthetic values also are endowed with spirituality. The *Upaniṣadic* or *Advaitic* notion of *Brahman* is a classic example. It is spiritual because it is neither worldly (physical) nor religious. If knowledge is spiritual, then its *pramā* (object) also must be spiritual. ‘*Raso vai saḥ*’ (that is, indeed, *rasa*) is an example for spiritual status of aesthetic value. In this case ‘that’ according to, at least one interpretation means ‘*Para Brahma*’ or highest reality and *Rasa* may be taken to mean beauty. The metaphysical or spiritual element involved in philosophy must have been hijacked by religions to formulate their notions of gods (and perhaps to counter their rivals).

Let us return to knowledge again. Indian philosophy recognizes knowledge at two levels; *Parā Vidyā* (higher knowledge) and *Aparā Vidyā* (lower knowledge). Since knowledge is spiritual, only the former is true knowledge of reality, whereas the latter is slightly inferior, it refers to worldly knowledge. Though the *Upaniṣads* subscribe to this view, subsequent systems, (with the exception of *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā*) which are supposed to be commentaries on the *Upaniṣads*, regarded perception, for example, as a means of knowledge. *Upamāna* (comparison) is another *pramāṇa* (means of knowledge). Not only lower knowledge, but also erroneous knowledge was seriously considered as species of knowledge (e.g., *akhyāti*) by systems of philosophy. Therefore even *Aparā Vidyā* retained its place. *Parā Vidyā* and *Aparā Vidyā* have their own place in the Indian thought, however they have been reconciled in Indian ethics in a remarkable manner. The concept of the *puruṣārtha* clarifies that only through *Dharma*, i.e., righteous means, man should acquire *artha* (wealth) and satisfy *kāma* (any sensuous desire), the very same means to attain *mokṣa* (liberation). The law of parsimony is very well adhered to in regard to the questions of social and moral philosophy in the Indian context.

### Check Your Progress II

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. ‘Knowledge is Power’, analyse this dictum in Indian Philosophical Context.

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2. Write a note on the possibility of the applicability of the term “Hindu Philosophy”.

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## 1.4 PHILOSOPHY AND LIFE

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We have seen that in Indian philosophy value and human life are inextricably blended. Now, the next pertinent question is: what is the aim of life according to Indian philosophers? To understand it simplistically, the aim of life according to the Indian tradition is to make a pilgrimage from 'misery to happiness'. This is a single thread which runs through the whole gamut of Indian philosophy. At one point of time, vertical split occurred in philosophical tradition leading to the birth of orthodox and heterodox schools of thought, yet, they concur on one issue, i.e., the aim of life. The dispute between these two poles did not prevent them from embracing a common goal. But in what sense is this goal a philosophical issue? This is one question which arises in this context: how can two opposing schools of thought have a common denominator? This is another.

Answers to the first question can be construed as follows. Knowledge as value is unique by itself. If the instrument which gives thrust to the quality of lifestyle has any economic value, then from a different perspective, if any, knowledge which reforms lifestyle also must possess value. Therefore knowledge became 'the' value in Indian thought. A *Jñāni* (knowledgeable person) in Socratic sense perceives not only routine life, but also the world in which he lives, differently because knowledge changes his world view. This type of change carries with it moral value. It means that the aim of life becomes an ethical issue. In this sense it becomes a philosophical issue.

Answer to the second question is still simpler. All schools of philosophy unanimously admit that the pursuit of happiness is the sole aim and unanimity stops there. But these two poles differ when they specify what happiness is. An example may make the point clear. All political parties, in their election manifesto, proclaim that their sole aim is uplifting the downtrodden. But the mechanism of doing so differs from one party to the other. Now the position is clear. Orthodox and heterodox schools differ on what happiness is and on what constitute happiness. Even within the heterodox system the idea of happiness differs. The Cārvāka School maintains that happiness consists in pleasure whereas Buddhism asserts that happiness consists in *nirvāṇa* if happiness is to be construed as elimination of misery.

As we have mentioned that spirituality is the essence of Indian philosophy. Against this background, let us analyse what happiness is. Neither is the physical world nor is earthly pleasure permanent or ultimate. Hopefully, no one entertains the illusion that this world is eternal. However, not many care to think whether or not everlasting peace or happiness is possible within the bounds of a finite world. Indian philosophy is characterized by this thought. The desire to attain eternity is common to the Greek and the Indian traditions. However, in the latter case this desire takes a different form. Hence eternity is tantamount to permanent liberation from misery. A permanent liberation from misery is tantamount to attainment of permanent happiness and this is eternity. It is variously designated as *mokṣa*, *nirvāṇa*, etc. In its ordinary sense *vairāgya* means renouncing

happiness. But in real sense what has to be renounced is not happiness, but pleasure. *Vairāgya* in conjunction with knowledge leads to eternal happiness. Hence in Indian context *vairāgya* is 'renounce worldly pleasure and attain eternal happiness'. It is possible that the very idea of renunciation invites strong objections. But in one definite sense such a renunciation is desirable. *Vairāgya* should be construed as elimination of greed and inclusion of contentment in life. This is the hidden meaning of *vairāgya*. What happened, in course of time, was that both dimensions were wrongly interpreted leading to the conclusion that *vairāgya* is not only negative but also is the sign of pessimism. It did not stop at this stage, but extended to the whole of Indian philosophy.

Moreover, in the twentieth century, westerners believed that in India there was nothing like philosophy, but only myth and casuistry in the garb of philosophy. While the western scholars argued that in India, philosophy was totally corrupted by religion, some Indian scholars under the influence of Marxism failed to separate philosophy from custom and tradition. The merits and demerits of their arguments and counterarguments are not relevant presently. But the sense, in which the world religion has to be construed, if it has to be regarded as philosophically constructive, is important. If the word religion is taken to mean tribal religion, then its association with philosophy spells doom to the latter. In India, philosophy was not influenced by religion in this sense. On the other hand, various religious sects, which grew later, were influenced by philosophy.

Now, let's take the criticisms of those scholars, who admit that in ancient India there was a philosophical movement, merit our considerations. According to one criticism, Indian thought prompted a negative outlook and therefore, is self-destructive because it negates the reality of the physical world. This criticism can be rebutted in two stages. In the first place, Indian philosophy does not deny the physical world in absolute terms. A particular system of philosophy does not become a negative doctrine just because it regards the world as impermanent and that what is impermanent is regarded as not ultimately real. No scientist has ever dared to say that the universe is eternal. If the critic's argument is admitted, then Plato's philosophy also becomes negative in character. Indian philosophers, like Plato, admitted something permanent. Impermanence and permanence are relative terms; relevance of any one of them demands the relevance of another. Secondly, what is relative is always relative to something different. There is nothing like absolute relativity. The last two statements which, actually, explicate the essence of the theory of relativity holds good here also.

Now let us consider the second stage of refutation. Is it legitimate to categorize any doctrine as negative? Refutation is an important step in arguments, but it is not final. If science can be characterized as 'satisfying a negative requirement such as falsifiability' (Karl Popper, 1959, p.41), then philosophy, whether Indian or western, also is entitled to the same benefit or status. To a great extent Indian philosophy followed the principle of 'Assertion through refutation'.

The second criticism is about the accusation that Indian philosophy is pessimistic. Any theory, which negates this world and life in absolute sense, ought to be pessimistic. The very fact that this criticism draws support from two sources of error shows the degree of misunderstanding. The desire to escape from misery was misconstrued as the desire to escape from the external world; it was ultimately a matter of discouraging merely earthly pleasure. Negation of earthly pleasure is

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not tantamount to the negation of happiness because pleasure and happiness are, evidently, different. *Mokṣa* is simply the Sanskrit version of happiness. Pleasure is not only momentary but also is not pure in the sense that pleasure always comes with pain. If we consider British philosopher Jeremy Bentham's criteria, then these criteria satisfy not pleasure but happiness. Duration, intensity and purity do not, in reality, characterize pleasure but happiness. Perhaps proximity alone satisfies pleasure. If so, even from a practical standpoint any philosophy which regards *mokṣa* as ideal ceases to be pessimistic.

Desire to escape from this world perhaps appears to be escapist. However, in the Indian context, to move beyond this world is to liberate oneself from the cycle of birth and death and indulgence in the world. Yet, attainment of *mokṣa* is regarded as a possibility during the lifespan of an individual (this is what is called *jīvanmukti*), there is no reason to regard the external world as an evil. It is, however, true that not only critics, but also the votaries of Indian philosophy misunderstood the concept of *mokṣa* and it led to the cardinal mistake of treating the external world as evil.

One more objection can be raised to *mokṣa*. Is *mokṣa* a meaningful ideal? In the first place *mokṣa* must be possible, and secondly, its realisation must be humanly possible. In the absence of either of them does it not cease to be meaningful? Let us assume that it is humanly possible to attain *mokṣa*, then it remains an ideal. But then nothing is lost. If we pursue an unattainable ideal, then we progress towards that ideal. What matters is progress. Plato's Utopia is an example which comes very close to the ideal of *mokṣa* in this respect. Progress in the right direction is true progress. There is no way to know if one can truly achieve *mokṣa* in one's lifetime, however all one can do is pursue a life towards *mokṣa* almost like an ideal which shall help one live a more morally fulfilling life.

In the western tradition only Greeks believed in the immortality of the soul. It became totally alien to modern western philosophy, though it found favour with Christianity. The Paradox is that immortality of the soul is a common theme to Christianity and Indian philosophy, whereas it ought to have been common to western philosophy and Christianity because the west happens to be the mainland of Christianity. It illustrates one crucial factor. Religion does not determine philosophy. On the other hand, philosophy has the required potential at least to influence religion, if not determine the same.

We saw that *mokṣa*, *nirvāṇa*, cessation of all kinds of misery are the goals of Indian philosophical schools. Some scholars say that Indian Philosophy has a soteriological purpose. But the idea that the central thought of Indian philosophy is soteriological purpose is not free from dispute. Some people consider it a philosophy of life and declare it philosophy on this basis, some declare it different from philosophy on the same basis. Indian Philosopher Bimal Kṛṣṇa Matilal considers it philosophy by establishing epistemology as the central element and also considers it equivalent to Western philosophy, while Daya Kṛṣṇa declares it philosophy on the basis of "Conceptual Confusions and Conceptual Clarifications", that is, philosophy contemplates on concepts from arguments and so does Indian philosophy, that is the reason to call it *darśan* (philosophy).



Thus there are many ideas in this regard as to why Indian philosophy is philosophy. Although a detailed study can be done in this regard from the reference list and it is sufficient to state it here as an indication for this unit, so that whatever historical and characteristic description is done, there will remain no doubt as this is the only idea and it is accepted to all.

### Check Your Progress III

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What is 'quest of life' according to Indian Philosophy?

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2. Is Indian Philosophy pessimistic and escapist? Evaluate.

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## 1.5 LET US SUM UP

Philosophy is derived from two Greek words which mean love of knowledge or wisdom. In Indian tradition philosophy means Darśana or *tattva*. Indian outlook is essentially different from western outlook. In terms of problems there is no difference between Indian and western philosophical traditions. Indian philosophers perceived knowledge as power in a different perspective. Bacon regarded knowledge as the means to establish authority over the external world. On the other hand, Indians regarded knowledge as essential to establish control over one's own self. Indians recognized philosophy itself as a value. Therefore philosophy, in India, was accepted as a way of life. With the sole exception of the Cārvāka, all other systems of philosophy in India accepted liberation in one or the other sense. Philosophy is independent of religion. However, religion may or may not be independent of philosophy.

## 1.6 KEY WORDS

- Yāgas and Yajñas** : Yagas and Yajñas are sacred rituals done to appease God, performed during the Vedic period.
- Pessimism** : Pessimism, from the Latin '*pessimus*' (worst), is a painful state of mind which negatively colours the perception of life, especially with regard to future events. Value judgments may

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## 1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. The word '*darśana*' comes from the word *tattva* — the ultimate reality. This ultimate reality is the knowing reality. It not only describes the metaphysical component but also the epistemological component. However, the summation of both the components is necessary in describing *darśana*. Epistemological component is very important, since it involves knowing the ultimate reality. In the initial stage there was no distinction between reality and epistemic subject. Epistemologically knowledge became inward. In the course of time human related oneself to value and identify with the reality. So in Indian context, value is not regarded only to the subject matter of philosophy but philosophy itself is regarded as value.
2. In Indian context philosophy is understood as '*darśana*' -to see or to realize. This realization corresponds to that of knowledge. When we say that we are realizing a thing, it amounts to say that we have some sort of knowledge. This correspondence relationship is one to one and it is nearly isomorphic. *Tattva* stands for two words '*tat*' and '*tva*'. The etymological meaning of this word is 'you are that'. This mainly refers to the Ultimate reality in Indian philosophy. The word *darśana* stands for the ultimate reality and it is a knowing reality thus involving both metaphysical and epistemological components and satisfactorily explaining the description of *darśana* in Indian context.

### Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. In the post-renaissance age Bacon propagated the famous dictum 'knowledge is power'. This principle changed forever the very direction of the evolution of science. But the ancient Indians never believed in this dictum. On the contrary, they performed *yāgas* to meet practical ends and *yajñas* to achieve spiritual gain. But in a strict sense, Indians regarded knowledge as power because for them knowledge was a way of life and this is the reason why for them knowledge was never intrinsic. However, it is necessary to look into the connotation of the word power. The Baconian 'power' was necessary to experience control over nature, but the Indian 'power' was supposed to be the instrument to subjugate one's own self to nature. This is the prime principle which forms the cornerstone of early *vedic* thought. This radical change in the meaning of the word 'power' also explains the difference in worldview which can be easily discerned when the belief-systems and attitudes of Indians and Europeans are compared and contrasted

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2. In this regard, an analogy may clear the mist surrounding Indian philosophy. Western philosophy is not divided into Christian philosophy and Jewish philosophy, though all western philosophers (excluding Greek philosophers) in loose sense are either Christians or Jews. Likewise, it is highly inappropriate to talk about '*Hindu philosophy*', though majority of Indian philosophers were 'committed' *Hindus*. It is true that a few philosophers in India became the heads of religious groups or sects (eg. Rāmānuja or Madhva). But then we have St. Augustine, St. Aquinas, etc. in the west also. But nobody characterizes their philosophy as Christian philosophy. But surely, we have Buddhist or Jaina philosophy because neither Buddhism nor Jainism is a religion in the strict sense of the term. At this point, a pertinent question arises, if there is Buddhist philosophy, then why not Hindu philosophy? To believe that there is such philosophy amounts to putting the cart in front of the horse. Philosophy in India did not originate from *Sanātana dharma* – or Hindu *dharma* as it is popularly known as – but it is the other way round.

### Answers to Check your progress III

1. It is easy to discover a solution to this quest in Indian philosophy. However, it is not so easy to reach the same in western tradition (it is true that existentialism attempted the same, but it remained a sort of island and was obliterated by analytic tradition). The aim of life according to Indian tradition is to make a pilgrimage from 'misery to happiness'. This is a single thread which runs through the whole gamut of Indian philosophy. At one point of time, vertical split occurred in philosophical tradition leading to the birth of orthodox and heterodox schools of thought. However, they concur on one issue, i.e., the aim of life. The dispute between these two poles did not prevent them from embracing a common goal-misery to happiness.
2. This criticism draws support from two sources of error shows the degree of misunderstanding. First, the desire to escape from misery was misconstrued as the desire to escape from the external world. Second, it discourages earthly pleasure. Let us consider the second source first. Negation of earthly pleasure is not tantamount to the negation of happiness because pleasure and happiness are, evidently, different. *Mokṣa* is simply the Sanskrit version of happiness. Pleasure is not only momentary but also is not pure in the sense that pleasure always comes with pain. If we consider Bentham's criteria, then these criteria satisfy not pleasure but happiness. Duration, intensity and purity do not, in reality, characterize pleasure but happiness. Perhaps proximity alone satisfies pleasure. If so, even from a practical standpoint any philosophy which regards *mokṣa* as ideal ceases to be pessimistic.

Now let us turn to the first source. Desire to escape from this world describes the mindset of an escapist. There are references to rebirth. Rebirth may only be a myth and something beyond verification. But when attainment of *mokṣa* is regarded as a possibility during the lifespan of an individual (this is what is called *jīvanmukti*), there is no reason to regard the external world as an evil. It is, however, true that not only critics, but also the votaries of Indian philosophy misunderstood the concept of *mokṣa* and it led to the cardinal mistake of treating external world as evil.

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## UNIT 2 INDIAN SCRIPTURES\*

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### Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 The subject matter of *Smṛti*
- 2.3 Mythology
- 2.4 Vedāṅgas
- 2.5 Epics
- 2.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.7 Key Words
- 2.8 Further Readings and References
- 2.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit, you are exposed to the sources of ancient Indian culture. However, the study material excludes prominent texts like the *Vedas* (also called *Śruti*) sources of Buddhism and Jainism since there are other units reserved for these sources. This unit, therefore, includes only the followings:

- *Smṛti*,
- Mythology
- *Vedāṅgas* and
- *Epics (Mahākāvyas)*

Since they only belong to the periphery of philosophy, mere cursory reference will suffice.

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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The word '*Smṛti*' means 'that which is in memory.' The texts, which are called '*Smṛti*', appeared in written form at the initial stage itself. The age of *Smṛti*, followed the age of *Vedas*. Since the *Vedic* period stretches to several centuries, it is also likely that *Smṛti* might have appeared during the closing period of the *Vedas*. Consequently, all *Smṛtikāras* (the author of *Smṛti*) claimed that their works drew support from the *Vedas* and also that their works are nothing more than clarifications of the *Vedas*. However, we can easily discern in *Smṛtis* a lot of variations from *Vedas*. Evidently, such deviations do not get any support from the *Vedas*.

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### 2.2 THE SUBJECT MATTER OF *SMṚTI*

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*Smṛti* is also known as *Dharma Śāstra*, which means code of conduct. The

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code of conduct has three divisions: rituals, discharge of social responsibility and atonement for sins which include crimes. It is important to note that there is no mention of rights fundamental or any other kind. The emphasis is upon 'prescription and proscription' only. The code of conduct is identical with the 'constitution' and so it is the same as the penal code formulated by the present-day governments. Hence, *Smṛti* emphasizes two aspects of life — 'Dhārmic' and social. The former does not simply exist without the latter. The role of ritual is restricted to individual life, household life to be precise. All these dimensions together constitute 'Dharma Śāstra'. Though it is claimed that there were several *Smṛtis*, history has recorded only a few. Among them only three are well known, sometimes for wrong reasons. *Vidhi* and *Niṣedha* were codified by three persons, Manu, Yajñyavalkya and Parāśara, and consequently, the *Smṛtis* were named after them. A cursory reference to these *Smṛtis* is enough.

An important aspect of *Smṛti* is its rigidity. Fixation of duties and emphasis upon duties resemble, to a great extent, the directive principles enshrined in the constitution. While four-fold division of society is one type, four fold division of individual life is another. *Smṛti* is very clear about not only four classes, but also four stages (*brahmacarya*, *gārhasthya*, *vānaprastha* and *saṅyāsa*) in the life of an individual. There is no scope for switching from one position to another in a random manner. The last division, viz., atonement for sins deals precisely with this sort of prohibited switching. The upshot of this discrimination is that liberty took back seat, but stability in society was prioritized. This will help us to infer the kind of political system which *Smṛti* supported. Surely, *Smṛti* did not support democratic system, though during *Vedic* age democratic system flourished.

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### 2.3 MYTHOLOGY

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Mythology and History in India, it is claimed, are indistinguishable. Mythology in Sanskrit means 'purāṇa'. This word has two slightly differing etymological meanings; *purā* (past), *atītam* (Lost), *anāgatam* (about to happen) – is one meaning. *purā* (past), *bhavam* (happened) is another. In terms of structure *Purāṇa* consists of five components. They are listed as follows:

Description of nation or nations and their history

History of creation

History of re-creation

Description of dynasties

Story of each *Manu* (*Manvantara*)

First and fourth components do incorporate elements of history. However, there is a vital difference, history follows a certain method and therefore, at some point to time or the other, it is possible to dispute what a historian claims, because history tries to gather as much evidence (not facts) as possible. *Purāṇas*, however, are altogether different. The relevance of evidence is totally alien to *Purāṇas*. It is, therefore, impossible to refute what *Purāṇas* claim. Nor can we defend the same.

*Purāṇas* are eighteen in number. Since they are not relevant philosophically, it is not even necessary to list them. In addition to five components mentioned earlier, many *Purāṇas* deal with cosmology. Perhaps this is the only topic common to philosophy and *Purāṇas*. Interestingly, one *Purāṇa*, viz., *Vāyupurāṇa* attempts at geography, music, etc. Apart from the neglect of evidence, *Purāṇas* suffer from one more defect. All *Purāṇas* combine legends related to gods and demons, life after death, etc. which disqualify mythology from becoming worthy of serious philosophical study. In defence of *Purāṇas*, it can be said that though *Purāṇas* are related to mainly theological issues, they include almost all activities of life and hence they ought to occupy an important position in the list of disciplines. But this all inclusiveness itself is a serious defect.

### Check Your Progress I

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. Discuss briefly the rigidity of *Smṛti*.

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2. Explain briefly the subject-matter of *Purāṇa*.

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## 2.4 VEDĀṄGAS

*Vedāṅgas* are also known as *ṣadāṅgas*, which means six organs. The function of these six organs is to explicate the intricate thoughts of the *Vedas*. Those organs are *Śikṣā* (phonetics), *vyākaraṇa* (grammar; to be more specific, *Vedic* grammar), *chandas* (prosody), *nirukta* (etymology and dictionary), *jyotiṣa* (astronomy) and *kalpa* (rituals).

It was believed that proper understanding of the *Vedic* texts is possible only when all these organs are strictly followed. Two extraordinary characteristics of the *Vedas* form the background of these organs. In the first place, the *Vedas* were held to be *apauruṣeya* (independent of man). Therefore, no change in any form for any reason was admissible. Secondly, it was also believed that the *Vedas* should be taught and learnt only orally. Consequently, it took several centuries for Indians to put the *Vedas* in writing. Without going into the merits and demerits of this particular prescription, we should examine the role played by *Vedāṅga* in protecting the *Vedic* tradition.

Sāyaṇa, in his *Ṛg-Veda Bhāṣya*, has defined *Śikṣā* as follows; ‘that which teaches pronunciation in accordance with *swara* (vowel) and *Varṇa* (letter) is called *Śikṣā*. Clarity in speech and ability to listen correctly are the prerequisite to learn the *Vedas*. This is the reason why the *Vedas* are also called ‘*anuśrava* (that which follows listening). The emphasis upon clear pronunciation is perfectly understandable because due to the unique structure of the *Vedic* language, which is the most primitive form of Sanskrit language set by very different grammar, even the slightest variation in pronunciation could lead to total change of meaning.

### Vyākaraṇa, Chandas and Nirukta

These three organs are not unique in the sense that the role, which they play with regard to the *Vedic* language, is very much similar to the role of grammar or dictionary in any other language. Since no language is possible without grammar, *Vedic* grammar must be as old as the *Vedas*. If the *Vedas* are *apauruṣeya*, then the *Vedic* grammar also ought to have been *apauruṣeya*. However, it is not the case. Among the extant works of grammar, Paṇinī’s work *Aṣṭādhyāyī* is the oldest one. It is said that this is a fourth Century A.D. work. However, earlier *Vedic* dictionaries mention other *vaiyākaraṇas*. Since the dictionary is more ancient than, Paṇinī’s work, it is obvious that other *vaiyākaraṇas*’ works are more ancient. The mention of these aspects shows that grammar is *pauruṣeya*. Hence language should be *pauruṣeya*. However, one grammarian by the name Shakatayana maintains that even grammar is *apauruṣeya*. According to him, the oldest work on grammar is *aindra vyākaraṇa*. It is named so since, according to the legend, men received it from *Indra*.

The source of prosody is ‘*chandas sūtra*’ by one *Piṅgalācārya*. Nothing is known about this author. This work includes both *Vedic* and non-*Vedic* prosody. Generally, the *Samhitās* are bound by definite prosody. Only *Kṛṣṇa-Yajurveda* and *Atharva-Veda samhitās* are occasionally prosaic. Hence, prosody occupies a prominent role in the study of the *Vedas*. *Paṇinī* says, ‘*chandaḥ padau tu vedasya*’. Which means prosody is the very foundation of *Vedas*. In course of time, the *Vedic* language itself became prosody. The *Vedic* prosody has one unique feature, which is mentioned by *Kātyāyana*. He says, ‘*yat akṣara parimāṇam tat chandaḥ*’. It means, ‘the one which determines the number (or quantity) of letters, that is prosody. It should be noted that this is not the case with secular Sanskrit. It is said that the latter evolved from the former.

The *Vedic* prosody consists of what is called *pāda* or quartet. Generally, a quartet is supposed to possess four letters. This, perhaps, became a characteristic at the later stage because there are eleven principal prosody, which differ not only in the number of quartets, but also in the number of letters in each quartets, whereas *trishtup chandas* consists of four quartets with eleven letters in each of them. A prosody may differ from another as regards the pattern of quartets. For example, *kakup chandas* have eight letters in the first and third quartets and twelve letters in the second. This difference shows that there is a little freedom here which is conspicuous by its absence elsewhere.

*Nirukta* provides the meaning of the *Vedic* terms. In the first step, terms were collected which constituted a dictionary. However, mere synonym or lexical



meaning would defeat the very purpose of compiling terms. *Nirukta* does not provide just this sort of meaning. What it indulges in is hermeneutic exercise. Hence it is more than any ordinary dictionary.

Let us start with the structure of the dictionary. A lexicographer, by name Yāska collected these terms and provided the most authentic interpretation. The dictionary consists of all 1770 terms spread over three *kāṇḍas*. First *kāṇḍa* consists of three chapters, which is called ‘*naighantuka*’, second and third consisting of one chapter each are called ‘*naigama* and *daivata*. *Nirukta* is an interpretation of these terms mainly and to some extent he has quoted some *mantras* and interpreted the same. *Nirukta* itself consists of fourteen chapters of which the first six chapters deal with *naighantuka kāṇḍa* and *Naigama Kāṇḍa* and the next six chapters deal with *Daivata Kāṇḍa*. Last two are somewhat like appendices.

### Jyotiṣa

Jyotiṣa -Astrology or sometime known as Astronomy- evolved in ancient India out of necessity. *Yajñas* could not be performed at the discretion of any one. In the strict sense of the term, it was seasonal. Every *varṇa* (except *śūdra*) had a fixed season to perform *yajñas*. *Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa* spoke so, ‘*vasante brāhmaṇaḥ*, (Brāhmin during spring), *agnimādadhīta* (ignite holy fire), *grīṣme rājanyaḥ* (Kshatriya during summer), *ādadhīta*, *śaradi vaiśyaḥ* (*Vaiśhya* during post-monsoon) *ādadhīta*’. Igniting holy fire is very important because only it ought to set any programme in motion. Not only was season important, but also exact time of starting *yajñas* was important for which it was necessary to track the movement of not only the sun but also all celestial bodies. Most important among them are twenty-seven stars. This could be done only with adequate knowledge of astronomy.

### Kalpa Sūtras

*Kalpa Sūtras* are so called because whatever material is provided by them is all in the form of formulas. The explanation *Kalpa Sūtras* is the same as that of *Brahma Sūtra*; *alpākṣaram* (brief), *asandigdham* (unambiguous or incontrovertible), *sāravat* (complete in essence), *vishwato mukham* (all inclusive). *Kalpa Sūtra* literally means action – indicating formula. Action is of four types, *śrauta*, *grhya*, *dharma* and *śulba*. The last one differs, more or less, in type from the rest. Hence, let us consider it at the end. The first three are common to *Ṛk*, *Yajur* and *Sāma*. But all three *Kalpa Sūtras* differ from one *Veda* to another as regards prescriptions and scope. For example, *Āśwalāyana* and *Śāṅkhāyana sūtras* of *Ṛg Veda* cover all three *Kalpa sūtras*. Since every class of *sūtra* has distinct commands, they constitute rituals. Let us consider each *Kalpa* seParātely and represent membership using tables.

Table – A

### ŚRAUTA

Āśwalāyana

Ṛg Veda

Śāṅkhāyana

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Kātyāyana

Śukla Yajurveda

Bodhāyana

Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda

Āpastamba

Satyāṣaḍha

Vaikhānasa

Bhāradwāja

Mānava

Arśeya

Sāmaveda

Vaitāna

Atharva *Veda*

Table - B

**GRIHYA**

Āśwalāyana

Ṛg Veda

Śāṅkhāyana

Paraskāra

Śukla Yajurveda

Bharadwaja

Āpastamba

Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda

Bodhāyana

Gobhila

Khadira

Sāmaveda

Jaimini

Kauśika

Atharvaveda

**DHARMA**

|           |                 |
|-----------|-----------------|
| Vaśiṣṭha  | Ṛgveda          |
| Bodhāyana | Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda |
| Āpastamba |                 |
| Gautama   | Sāmaveda        |

*Dharma sūtras* pertaining to *Śukla Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda* are not extant.

Let us examine what these *sūtras* are about. *Āśwalāyana sūtra* was founded by Āśwalāyana, a student of Śaunaka. Likewise, many *sūtras* are known after the names of the founders just as many laws and theories in science are named after scientists like Newton's Laws of Motion, etc. All *śrauta sūtras* specify the manner in which *yajñas* and *yāgas* have to be performed. They are essentially prescriptive which do not allow any room for deviation. The very fact that there are several *śrauta sūtras*, which subscribe to different *Vedas*, indicates that there were several ways in which *yajñas* were performed.

Two aspects deserve mention. *Yāgas* were performed solely with the motive of reaping worldly benefits. Second, man was ineligible to perform *Yāga* in the absence of his wife, which means she enjoyed equal status in the ritual. *Gṛhya sūtras* prescribe household duties. The point to be noted is that all *Gṛhya sūtras* agree on one particular count, i.e., what ought to be done. But they differ on another count, i.e., how it ought to be done. No *Gṛhya sūtra* disagrees, for example, with the relevance of, say, marriage. But they disagree with the manner in which it is to be performed. Secondly, all four *sūtras* are complementary to each other. So there is neither choice nor contradiction. To fulfill his obligation one has to perform all rituals in the manner prescribed.

The rituals pertaining to *Gṛhya sūtras* are of two types. One type of ritual has to be performed only once in life (in some cases, there are exceptions). Second type of rituals has to be performed everyday or once in a year. There are sixteen such obligations which are called '*ṣodaśa saṃskāras*'. There are four classes of such *saṃskāras*: *saṃskāras* to be performed before birth, after birth, to begin the learning of the *Vedas* and to prepare man for marriage, etc. It should be noted that there are separate *saṃskāras* for men and women.

It is not necessary to consider all these *saṃskāras*. What is important is to know the manner in which they were followed and qualifications which were held as necessary. The characteristic of these *saṃskāras* is that they were (or are) not regarded as common to all *Varṇas*. Two types of discrimination are well known. One discrimination is *Varṇa* based; i.e., Brāhmin, Kṣatriya, etc. Second discrimination is gender based.

The first category of discrimination eventually led to the caste system. It, also, might have resulted in hierarchy. Secondly, gender based discrimination provided

an upper hand to men of higher classes. In a way, actions were inconsequential in so far as higher class men were considered. But it was not so in the case of women. One argument is that women, like *sūdras*, were denied education because they were not entitled to some crucial *saṃskāras*. It is insignificant that men were not entitled to some *saṃskāras* to which women were entitled because this limitation did not really affect men. But it was not so in the case of women. One particular *saṃskāra* deserves special mention. *Brahmopadeśa*, for example, is not permissible for *sūdras* and *women*, even to this day. It is this particular *saṃskāra* which makes *Brāhmin* caste, in particular, a distinct caste. It also explains why *Brāhmin* is called 'dwija' (twice born) after the completion of this *saṃskāra*. It is said that before this *saṃskāra* is performed, *Brāhmin* is not a *Brāhmin* at all and so this *saṃskāra* is supposed to give second birth to him.

Surely, even within the framework of *chāturvarṇya* (Four-fold *Varnas*) system this particular argument is not endorsed by all. The fact that the argument, being referred to, is at variance with some established or accepted norms set by *smṛtis* was totally ignored while speaking about *Brāhmins*. Our purpose, surely, is not go into the merits and demerits or *cāturvarṇya* or caste system, but to demonstrate structural changes which took place in belief-systems, perspective in which age old customs came to be understood, and consequently rapid changes which affected the society because this is what precisely happened over centuries in Indian society.

If we consider the literal meaning of the word '*saṃskāra*', then it becomes evident that it is meant to uplift man (or woman) spiritually. It is argued that they also produce other classes of positive results; physical well being is one. If so, why was a certain class (or classes) denied this benefit? It is not possible to discover any answer to this question within the framework of philosophy. A psychologist or sociologist may throw some light on such questions.

In spite of the fact that *saṃskāras* were spiritual in nature, the ulterior motive behind adherence to them is mundane. It is very easy to discover in the *saṃskāras* some spiritual support, if not any foundation, for all aspects of earthly life. For different reasons the *saṃskāras* did not receive support from the *Upaniṣads* and heterodox systems. The *Upaniṣads* disapproved of the *saṃskāras* because the goal was this-worldly. The heterodox systems strongly reacted to the *saṃskāras* because they claimed affinity to the *Vedas*. Despite differences in their philosophy, both the *Upaniṣads* and the heterodox systems adhered to life in the monastery. Their apathy to anything connected with earthly life is behind their antagonism to the *saṃskāras*. This discussion also brings to the surface an important fact that philosophy and religion do not coincide always if religion is understood as *Dharma*. While *saṃskāras* stand for *Dharma*, the *Upaniṣads* stand for philosophy.

*Kausika Sūtra* of *Atharvaveda* is unique because this *sūtra* does not deal with any type of spiritual matter unlike previously mentioned *sūtras*. It throws some light on herbal plants and thereby it helps in understanding the ancient system of Indian medicine. There is a sharp distinction between *Grhya sūtras* and *Dharma sūtras*. While *Grhya sūtras* regulate man's actions which are restricted to family, *Dharma sūtras* have societal leaning. *Gautama's Dharma sūtras* appear to be the earliest one. These *sūtras* specify not only the obligations

within the frame-work of *cāturvarṇya*, but also ‘*Rāja Dharma*’ – the duties of rulers. In Indian context morality is essentially based upon what the *Dharma sūtra* specifies. Hence the limits and defects of *Dharma sūtras* have distinct bearing on the acceptability of moral principles.

Last one to be considered in this section is *Śulba sūtra*. Though this *Sūtra* also is relevant in the context of performing *yajñas*, it is restricted to geometrical aspects only because in the absence of adequate knowledge of geometry it was impossible to construct the *Vedic* atlas. *Śulba sūtra* is an example of primitive technology developed by ancient Indians to meet the demands of ecclesiastical dimension of life.

### Check Your Progress II

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. What do you understand by *Śikṣa*?

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2. Write a short note on *Gṛhya Sūtras*

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## 2.5 EPICS

Though the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Māhābhārata* are two epics which have influenced literature for several centuries in all parts of India, the *Rāmāyaṇa* is not significant philosophically, unlike the *Māhābhārata* and we are not concerned with the literary value of these two epics. So it is sufficient if we notice that the *Rāmāyaṇa* accepts the principles of *Sanātana Dharma* and duties of rulers in particular. Since there is nothing philosophically new in this work, we need not consider it. It will serve our purpose if we concentrate on the philosophical component of the *Māhābhārata*.

Logic and epistemology which constitute any philosophical tradition have nothing to do with us when we study culture literature, etc. The *Māhābhārata* is not an exception. We can trace however, two philosophical issues in this work; one is expounded in the *Bhagavad-Gīta*. Second one is morality and polity expounded by two prominent characters; Vidura and Bhīṣma. But these philosophical issues in this work suffer from a serious drawback – drawback

from philosophical point of view. Nowhere in this work do we find discussion, or criticism which is the hallmark of philosophy. More than anything else, what we find is only a sermon. Therefore a brief reference to these elements is enough.

### **The Moral Philosophy of Vidura**

From the point of view of ethics, it is desirable to regard some characters as personification of virtue. Vidura and Bhīṣma belong to this category. In contrast to these characters in the *Māhābhārata*, we have other characters which are regarded as personification of evil. Why should any epic portray evil characters? This is one question. Are they in a broader perspective, really evil forces? This is another question. The second question is much deeper philosophically and cannot be answered easily. First one is slightly easier to handle. An epic must be vast. Hence it ought to include all facts of the world and all aspects of life. So, evil characters ought to find place in any epic worth the name.

Vidura's exposition of moral principles begins with a clear distinction between *śreyas* (desirable) and *preyas* (pleasing). He compares *śreyas* with medicine which is not palatable. It is immediately followed by a second analogy to demonstrate the status of pleasure which is invariably accompanied by evil. To make this concomitant relation explicit, Vidura compares pleasure with honey, pleasure seeker with one who collects honey and evil with abyss and says that the pleasure hunter is busy only in seeking honey unmindful of impending danger of falling into the abyss.

In the *Māhābhārata*, Vidura plays his role on three occasions. On the second occasion, Vidura plays the role of a counsellor. His counselling has a moral base. He makes an explicit distinction between two states of mind; those of wise man and ignorant. While Plato speaks of four cardinal virtues, Vidura speaks of six cardinal vices. Greed is one among them. He makes out a case for a wise man by listing the remaining vices - lust, anger, irrational attachment, arrogance and jealousy – which he does not possess. There is no need to describe the personality of one who is free from these vices.

Indeed, it is very interesting to note that Vidura concurs with Plato, when he describes an ignorant person. He is the one who neglects his duty, but tries to perform what is not his job. Secondly, he cannot distinguish between a true friend and enemy. All qualities attributed to an ignorant person can be found in Thrasymachus who indulges in violent attack on the ideas of Socrates. At the end of this particular session Vidura makes a list of Ten Commandments in which one Commandment is identical with Plato's classification of men into three classes; guardians (philosopher kings), soldiers and artisans. Both of them argue that these three classes ought to perform duties assigned to them only. It means that justice, according to Plato and *Dharma* according to Vidura, consists in every man doing his own duty and this is the cardinal principle of welfare state. This is the essence of Vidura's moral philosophy

In the last session, Vidura talks of death and the need to accept the same. Death and fear are nearly inseparable if man does not accept that death is inevitable. In this context Vidura accepts reality, i.e., human nature and maintains that man hardly follows wisdom. There is striking correspondence with what the

Buddha says: *tr̥ṣṇā* (desire) is the cause of misery, and remedy consists in the realisation of truth and that is knowledge of philosophy. In this respect, Vidura, the Buddha and Plato held an identical view. It is precisely in this sense that in Indian tradition philosophy always was regarded as a way of life.

### **Bhīṣma's Political Philosophy**

There is a sharp difference between western model of political philosophy as understood and practised today and the ancient Indian concept of polity. The difference essentially consists in shift from one end to the other, i.e., from rights to duty, with duty as the focus of sermon. Even democracy, the most liberal form of government prioritizes duties of citizens in spite of the fact that every citizen is entitled to fundamental rights. There is absolutely no gainsaying in holding the view that directive principles form the backbone of any democratic set-up. Bhīṣma's advice to Dharmarāja Yudhiṣṭhira, on the other hand, provides a very different picture. He specifies only the duties and responsibilities of the ruler with no mention of the duties of citizens. Against this backdrop, it becomes obvious that in real sense, a citizen is the king and ruler is his guardian. Several centuries before Plato visualized the role of guardians, the *Māhābhārata* portrayed king in a similar fashion. Bhīṣma's lecture not only explicitly mentions the king's qualities and duties but also it is the first ever treatise on public administration. Let us consider these aspects briefly.

King should be proactive, truthful and straightforward. According to Bhīṣma, these are the most important qualities of a king. He should be compassionate but not too soft. It is interesting to note that Plato starts from the other end, but arrives at the same result. According to him, guardians should be given moderate physical training coupled with music lest they will transform to beasts. The essence of '*rājadharmā*' is safe-guarding the interests of citizens. In fact, Bhīṣma lists thirty-six qualities in an ideal king which are necessary to follow *Rājadharmā* without which the citizens do not receive protection from the king.

Foreign policy is another aspect of public administration. Foreign policy involves two forces, enemies and friends. The role of friends is not much highlighted. But he emphasizes that the king should know how to deal with the enemy. Prudence is always the guiding force. Bhīṣma makes it very clear that war is not the solution. Nor did he mean that the enemy can be spared. Constant vigil, concealing one's own weakness and proper judgment only can ensure safety and security. All these descriptions apply under normal circumstances, whereas in distress even enemies should enjoy compassion because a humanitarian treatment may destroy enmity. Ultimately, humane outlook scores over other considerations.

### ***The Bhagavad Gīta***

The *Bhagavad Gīta* (song of God) is a part of *Mahābhārata*. It is a sacred and one of the most revered Indian scripture which comprises roughly 700 verses. The teacher of the *Bhagavad Gīta* is Lord Kṛṣṇa- the Divine One. The content of *Gīta* is the conversation between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna which took place on the battlefield before the start of the Kurukshetra war. As soon as Arjuna saw his cousins and loved one before the beginning of war, he started to face a

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confusion and moral dilemma about fighting with them. Consequently, Kṛṣṇa reminds and explains to Arjuna his duties as a warrior and prince. Meanwhile, Kṛṣṇa elaborates on different Yogic and Vedāntic philosophies. Thus, it is often being described as a concise guide to Hindu theology and also as a practical, self-contained guide to life.

*Gīta* is also known as *Gitopaniṣad*, implying its having the status of an *Upaniṣad*. Since the *Gīta* is drawn from the *Mahābhārata*, it is classified as a *Smṛiti* text. However, those branches of Hinduism that give it the status of an *Upaniṣad* also consider it a *śruti* or revealed text. As it is taken to represent a summary of the Upanishadic teachings, it is also called “the *Upaniṣad* of the *Upaniṣads*.”

Three features are prominent in the *Gīta*; knowledge, social obligation and devotion. The confluence of these principal features constitutes what is popularly known as *Yoga*. There is no need to consider here its role in life which the *Gīta* has explained. What is important is its position in philosophy. But there is no reference to its philosophical foundation anywhere in the *Gīta*. For example, consider ‘devotion’ (*bhakti*). Devotion is sensible only when ‘*Bhakta*’ is distinct from *Paramātmā*; not otherwise. In other words the refutation of the *Advaita* is a prerequisite to accept the relevance of *bhakti*. But nowhere do we find any reference to *Dvaita* or *Advaita* in the work. On the contrary, the *Gīta* concludes by merging obligation or *karma* and knowledge in *Bhakti*.

However, one point becomes clear from the *Gīta*; no one can attain *mokṣa* if he or she renounces this world. Renouncing the world is tantamount to renouncing obligations. Hence in defence of the *Gīta* one assertion can be unhesitatingly made, that the *Gīta* does not prioritize spirituality at the expense of worldly life. However, neither the charge that it does not do so nor the counter charge that it does, is philosophically insignificant. But this point is mentioned because attainment of *mokṣa* in relation to *karma* has primary importance in the *Gīta*.

Let us drop ‘*bhakti*’ and concentrate only on *Karma Yoga* and *Jñāna Yoga*. While *Jñāna* stands for realization at the highest level, *Karma* assumes a very different meaning. During the *Vedic* age, *Karma* meant only performing *Yajña*. But in the *Gīta* it has come to mean social obligation. *Yoga* came to be understood as dedication. Hence, *Karma Yoga* may be understood as discharging duty with a sense of commitment.

The most important element in the *Gīta* is the doctrine of *niṣkāma karma* which consists in discharging obligations in an impersonal manner. This attitude literally debars *yagas* because one performs it with selfish motive. The *Gīta* however, never advocated that *karma* should be renounced. What it clearly asserts is that ‘*Karma Phala*’ should be renounced. It only sidelines personal interest and upholds societal interest. Thus individuals become the means and society the end. An impersonal approach to duty does not affect the performer in any manner, i.e., neither success nor failure affects him or her. This attitude is ‘*Samatva Manobhāva*’ – equanimity of mind.

It is necessary to clarify the relation between the meaning of *karma* and *varṇa*. At this stage, *cāturvarṇya* (four-fold classification) becomes relevant. Translated into ordinary language, it means commitment to profession. ‘*cāturvarṇyam mayasṛṣṭam guṇakarma vibhāgaśaḥ*’ *Gīta*, 4/13); it means *guna* (quality) and



*karma* (profession) determine *Varṇa*. To this statement we can add another, quality determines profession. Commitment to profession is what *Dharma* is.

The *Gīta* makes a clear distinction between commitment and interest. Commitment is impersonal, whereas interest is personal. Vested interest is well-known. But there is nothing like vested commitment. When vested interest affects an individual, one may resort to prohibited means. But impersonal commitment does not result in this sort of selection. The maxim ‘ends do not justify the means’ is implicit in the *Gīta*.

One more aspect should be noted here. In fact, there is a mistaken notion that there is hierarchy in profession while it is not the case as far as the *Gīta* is concerned. However, there is a distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ or ‘constructive’ and ‘destructive’. It is good to discharge duty which is in conformity with one’s own nature, otherwise it is bad. Clearly, there is division of labour, and it is in the interest of society that such division is made mandatory. Therefore qualitative distinction in profession is strongly disapproved.

**Check Your Progress III**

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer  
 b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. How do you understand Bhīṣma’s foreign policy?.

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 .....  
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2. What is meant by *Niṣkāmakarma*?

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 .....  
 .....

**2.6 LET US SUM UP**

Indian Scriptures mainly have determined the life-style of Hindus. In fact, mainly there are four sources which prescribe the way of life. Among these sources, the *smritis*, whether consciously or inadvertently, institutionalized the caste system and women were downgraded. *Smritis* correspond to modern day constitution. However, what demarcates history from mythology is blurred. The *vedāngas* explicate the intricate thoughts of the *Vedas*. They specify intonation, grammar, structure, etc. According to the *vedāngas*, *chanting mantras* after knowing the meaning is very important. *Kalpa sūtras* are four in number namely; *śrauta*, *Gṛhya*, *dharma* and *Śulba*. They mainly deal with what rituals are to be observed, how they are to be observed, etc. The *Māhābhārata* possesses not only literary value, but also it is the first ever treatise on polity. The *Gīta*, with

other major social, spiritual aspects, is a philosophical treatise too. It expounds the philosophy of *niṣkāma karma* and *lokasaṁgraha*. *Gīta* gives priority to society over the individual.

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## 2.7 KEY WORDS

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|-----------------|---|--|
| <b>Epics</b>    | : | <i>Rāmāyaṇa</i> and the <i>Māhābhārata</i> are two epics which have influenced literature for several centuries in all parts of India  |
| <b>Vedāṅgas</b> | : | literally speaking <i>Vedāṅga</i> are ‘limbs of <i>Vedas</i> ’. <i>Vedāṅgas</i> are six in numbers namely; <i>Śikṣā</i> , <i>Chanda</i> , <i>Vyākaraṇa</i> , <i>Nirukta</i> , <i>Jyotiṣa</i> and <i>Kalpa</i> and are necessary to understand <i>Vedas</i> . |
| <b>Sūtra</b>    | : | <i>Sūtra</i> literally means a rope or thread that holds things together, and more metaphorically refers to an aphorism (or line, rule, formula), or a collection of such aphorisms in the form of a manual.   |

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## 2.8 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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## 2.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. An important aspect of *Smṛti* is its rigidity. Fixation of duties and emphasis upon duties resemble, to a great extent, the directive principles enshrined in the constitution. While four-fold division of society is one type, four fold division of individual life is another. *Smṛti* is very clear about not only four classes, but also four stages (*brahmacarya*, *gārhasthya*, *vānaprastha* and *sanyāsa*) in the life of an individual. There is no scope for switching from one position to another in a random manner. The last division, viz.,

atonement for sins deals precisely with this sort of prohibited switching. The upshot of this discrimination is that liberty took back seat, but stability in society was prioritized. This will help us to infer the kind of political system which *Smṛti* supported. Surely, *Smṛti* did not support democratic system, though during *Vedic* age democratic system flourished.

2. *Purāṇas* are eighteen in number. Since they are not relevant philosophically, it is not even necessary to list them. Many *Purāṇas* deal with cosmology. Perhaps this is the only topic common to philosophy and *Purāṇas*. Interestingly, one *Purāṇa*, viz., *Vāyu-Purāṇa* attempts at geography, music, etc. Apart from the neglect of evidence, *Purāṇas* suffer from one more defect. All *Purāṇas* combine legends related to gods and demons, life after death, etc. which disqualify mythology from becoming worthy of serious philosophical study.

### Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. Sāyaṇa, in his *Ṛg-Veda Bhāṣya*, has defined *Śikṣā* as follows; ‘that which teaches pronunciation in accordance with *swara* (vowel) and *Varṇa* (letter) is called *śikṣā*. Clarity in speech and ability to listen correctly are the prerequisite to learn the *Vedas*. This is the reason why the *Vedas* are also called ‘*anuśrava* (that which follows listening).
2. *Gṛhya sūtras* prescribe household duties. The point to be noted is that all *Gṛhya sūtras* agree on one particular count, i.e., what ought to be done. But they differ on another count, i.e., how it ought to be done. No *Gṛhya sūtra* disagrees, for example, with the relevance of, say, marriage. But they disagree with the manner in which it is to be performed. Secondly, all four *sūtras* are complementary to each other. So there is neither choice nor contradiction. To fulfil his obligation one has to perform all rituals in the manner prescribed.

### Answers to Check Your Progress III

1. When we look at the thoughts of Bhīṣma in *Māhābhārata*, we come to know that foreign policy is another aspect of public administration which has been discussed wildly. Foreign policy involves two forces, enemies and friends. The role of friends is not much highlighted. But he emphasizes that the king should know how to deal with the enemy. Prudence is always the guiding force. Bhīṣma makes it very clear that war is not the solution. Nor did he mean that the enemy can be spared. Constant vigil, concealing one’s own weakness and proper judgment only can ensure safety and security. All these descriptions apply under normal circumstances, whereas in distress even enemies should enjoy compassion because a humanitarian treatment may destroy enmity. Ultimately, humane outlook scores over other considerations.
2. The most important element in the *Gīta* is the doctrine of *niškāma karma* which consists in discharging obligations in an impersonal manner. This attitude literally debars *yāgas* because one performs it with selfish motive. The *Gīta*, however, never advocated that *karma* should be renounced. What it clearly asserts is that ‘*Karma Phala*’ should be renounced.

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## UNIT 3 PHILOSOPHY OF THE EPICS\*

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### Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 An Overview
- 3.3 Reflection on the Core Issues
- 3.4 Philosophical Response
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.6 Key Words
- 3.7 Further Readings and References
- 3.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 3.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this Unit, students are expected to know the following:

- Philosophy and Literature: Darśana and *Sahitya*
- Epics as *Mahākāvya*: Definition and Variety
- An overview of the Major *Mahākāvyas*
- An overview of The *Mahābhārata* and The *Bhagavad-Gīta*
- An overview of The *Rāmāyaṇa*
- Philosophical Imprint of the Epics.

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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Philosophy, in its original sense, denotes a quest for a vision that captures the essence of the world as a whole. In Greek antiquity, ‘*sophia*’ and ‘*philo*’ together meant the love of wisdom and the result as vision was described as ‘*kosmotheoria*’. German philosophers called this synoptic vision ‘*weltanschauung*’ or simply a world-view. The same enterprise is called Darśana in Indian philosophical parlance. Now, this vision would also include its narrative in the form of literature. Many philosophers and literary theorists, from West as well as East, have contended that both the disciplines should not be seen in isolation. They converge at many points and thereby being complementary and supplementary to each other. Philosophy devoid of concrete illustration from the historic world is blind and historicity without any philosophy is empty and dry.

The above point is most evident when we analyze a particular genre of poetry (or in general of literature) known as *epic*. The term epic is derived from the Greek and Latin words like ‘*epikos*’ and ‘*epicus*’ respectively meaning – a tale, story, prophecy, proverb or poetry in a large form. Around the eighteenth century, it was extended to mean a grand and heroic form. Accordingly, Miller

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Williams defined epic as a long narrative told on a grand scale of time and place, featuring a larger than life protagonist and heroic action. In India this sense of epic has existed since thousands of years ago. In Indian context, the epics may be denoted by *laukika sāhitya* (folk literature) or *Mahākāvya* (the great poems). In this unit, we will understand the basis of such division of literature and a detailed reflection on the contents, themes, and philosophy of the first two great epics of India out of the following:

1. Hindu Epics
  - i. The *Mahābhārata*
  - ii. The *Rāmayaṇa*
  - iii. Epics of Kālidāsa
2. Buddhists Epics of Ashvagoṣa
3. Jaina Epics

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## 3.2 AN OVERVIEW

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Before we delve deep into the contents, themes, and philosophy of major Indian epics, we need to construct a basic understanding of *kāvya* in Sanskrit literature. The word '*kāvya*' has been described in many ways by various philosophers yet the universal consensus is that the creation of a poet (*kavi*) is *kāvya* (*kaveḥ karma kāvyam*) and it must be able to evoke certain *rasa* (joy) in the heart of the perceiver or reader. It also involves aesthetic sensitivity. Accordingly, all the genres of Sanskrit literature of great importance would come under *kāvya*.

**Kāvya** is further divided into two kinds

### 1. Śravya Kāvya –

It is that which is linguistic, can be communicated verbally either through reading or perceiving. It would include genres like *padya* (poetry), *gadya* (prose) and *champu* (a mixture of *gadya* and *padya*). Further *gadya kāvya* is divided into *kathā* (story) and *akhyāyikā* (narratives). Finally, *padya kāvya* is divided in *Mahākāvya*, *khaṇḍakāvya* and *muktaka kāvya*. The last division is based on the volume of the content.

### 2. Dṛśya Kāvya –

It goes beyond the verbal communication as it involves communication of *rasa* through the characters. It might focus on their dress, gestures, curves, designs, actions, drama, and other fine arts. It also essentially involves visual metaphors (*rūpaka*).

### Origin and Development of Kāvya/ Mahākāvya

*Kāvya*s in Sanskrit literature originate in the earliest poetic hymns (*sūkta*) of Ṛgveda. Usha Sukta is an excellent example of Vedic *kāvya*. In the later developments of *Vedas*, as in *Brāhamaṇa*, *Āraṇyaka*, and *Upaniṣads* also, *kāvya* were scattered in poetic and dialogue form. Hence, the seeds of *kāvya* or *Mahākāvya* were present but not fully germinated. Epic as a *Mahākāvya* in its

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proper sense begins with the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki and *Mahābhārata* of Vyasa. Later on the tradition was carried forward by authors like Ashvaghosa, Kālidāsa, Bhāravi, Māgha, Śriharṣa, etc. In this unit, we shall explore the insights of the first two *Mahākāvya*.

**Characteristics of *Mahākāvya* –**

Ancient Indian scholars, like Bhamaha, author of *Agnipurana*, Dandi, Hemchandra, Vishvanatha, have attempted to formulate some essential characteristics in great detail. Among them, Dandi’s description of a *Mahākāvya* is most fascinating and universally accepted. Dandi, in his book *Kavyadarsha*, mentions that an Epic should commence in a bliss dispensing tone (*aśīrvādātmaka*), a mood of submission to the Divine (*namaskārātmaka*) and should hint at the subject matter (*vastunirdeśātmaka*). Its plot (*kathānaka*) should not be purely fictitious but based on the ancient historic records or on *Purāṇa* tradition.

Its protagonist should be of high moral caliber like patience, wisdom, courage, piety, etc. and should belong to a descent lineage. Protagonists can be one or many but have to be from the same or higher lineage. It should be structured in cantos (*sarga*), i.e., in different sections. The number of cantos must be at least eight and in every canto, only one particular kind of meter (*chand*) of the verses must be employed. The only exceptions are the last few verses, which can have slight modifications in their *chand*.

Furthermore, a *Mahākāvya* must exhibit either *śringāra rasa* (adornment) or *vīra rasa* (courage) or *śānta rasa* (peace) as the primary rasa the remaining two as secondary rasa. It must portray a harmonious picture of the four *puruṣārthadharma* (righteousness) *artha* (wealth) *kāma* (sensuous pleasure) and *Mokṣa* (ultimate Bliss as liberation). In addition, it must also vividly describe some common themes such as city, village, ocean, mountains, sunset, sunrise, garden, water-play, marriage, union and separation, child-birth, war, etc.

From the above characteristics, it is clearly evident that the *Mahākāvya*s were not just for the sake of literary scholarship, but they had specific philosophical leanings. The idea of salutation in the beginning (*maṅgalācaraṇa*), development of moral character, exhibition of life in its myriad form, the goal of life as *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *Mokṣa*, are some of the essential philosophical underpinnings of Epics or *Mahākāvya*. In the following sections, we shall delve deep into these philosophical notions after providing a brief sketch of the *Mahākāvya*s, viz., the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*.

**Check Your Progress I**

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.  
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What is the meaning and characteristics of epic and *Mahākāvya*?  
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.....  
.....

2. Briefly sketch the origin and development of *Mahākāvya*?

### 3.3 REFLECTION ON THE CORE ISSUES

Sanskrit literature can be broadly divided into two parts- *vedika* and *laukika*. *Vedika sāhitya* pertains to the transcendental philosophical matters. It includes *Samhitā*, *Brāhmaṇa*, *Āraṇyaka*, and *Upaniṣads*. It is also called *śabda pramāṇa*. *Laukika sāhitya* pertains to the worldly subject matter. Common people have direct access to them and which in turn influences their day-to-day activities of private and public sphere. The first *kavi* of *vedic sāhitya* was *Brahmā* while the first *kavi* of *laukika sāhitya* is the sage *Vālmīki*. *Vālmīki* is therefore known as the *adi kavi*. *Ādi* means the first and the great both.

#### 1. *The Rāmāyaṇa*

As indicated above the parameters of being the first and the great both justify the title of *Vālmīki* as *ādi* when we analyze his great epic work ‘the *Rāmāyaṇa*’. In the words of Jawaharlal Nehru- The story of the epic is a part of the texture of the lives of our people. In its praise A.A. Macdonell also writes – Probably no work of world literature, secular in origin, has ever produced such a profound influence on the life and thought of people as the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

#### The Texture of the *Rāmāyaṇa*

Though *Rāmāyaṇa* is so widely popular in India, that a detailed narration would be repeated yet we need to briefly grasp the texture of this Epic. Etymologically ‘*Rāmāyaṇa*’ comes from the two Sanskrit words – *Rāma* and *āyaṇa* meaning the path or place of *Rāma*. It is the grand and heroic journey of prince *Rāma*. The *Rāmāyaṇa* contains 24000 verses (*ślokas*) divided into seven chapters or cantos, namely, *Bālakāṇḍa*, *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, *Aranyakāṇḍa*, *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, *Sundarkāṇḍa*, *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, and *Uttarakāṇḍa*. A brief summary of these chapters is as follows:

#### 1. *Bālakāṇḍa*

As the name suggests, it describes how the prince *Rāma* and his brother- *Lakṣmaṇa*, *Bharat*, and *Śatrughna*, are born; how they are sent to *Gurukul* – the ancient Vedic school and how they learn various arts such as archery, politics, ethics, daily rituals, etc.

#### 2. *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*

The plot of the second chapter is the city palace of *Ayodhya*, when the four princes return to their palace; *Rāma* is set to inherit the throne. He also gets married to *Sīta* by breaking *Shiva*’s bow. But due to the envy of *Mantharā*, *Ram* is made to relinquish his title and go to exile with his wife and brother *Lakṣmaṇa*.

### **3. Aranyakāṇḍa**

It describes Rāma's early exile years in the forest and eventually during which many important events take place displaying the righteousness and courage of Rāma, Sīta, and Lakṣmaṇa. The chapter culminates with the abduction of Sīta by Rāvaṇa, the king of Laṅkā.

### **4. Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa**

The story progresses in the forest called Kiṣkindhā in southern India where Rāma meets his devoted allies like Hanumāna, Sugrīva, and Jāmvanta. The plan to bring back Sīta is set.

### **5. Sunderkāṇḍa**

It describes Rāma's journey to Laṅkā, It is sunder or beautiful in terms of lyrics, the praise of Hanuman and his army, and the joy of Sīta. It is also recited today in India in isolation from *Rāmāyaṇa*.

### **6. Yuddhakāṇḍa**

As the name suggests, it describes how the story culminates in a war between Rāma's and Rāvaṇa's army. Eventually, Rāvaṇa is killed and Sīta is rescued.

### **7. Uttarakāṇḍa**

The last chapter is on the life of Rāma having returned to Ayodhyā after exile. It also includes the banishment of Sīta, the birth of two sons, Lava and Kuśa, absorption of Sīta in the holy Earth, and the ascent of Rāma to the Heaven.

## **Philosophical Underpinnings of the *Rāmāyaṇa***

### **1. Rasas**

*Rasa* means the sense of joy that arises when one encounters an epic or any piece of art and literature. These are the seat of emotions in the human soul. The *pradhāna rasa* (primary emotion) of *Rāmāyaṇa* is *karuṇa rasa* (grief and compassion). This epic begins and dissolves in the same *rasa*. *Śringāra rasa* (romance) is seen in union, separation, and reunion of Rāma and Sīta. *Vīra rasa* (courage) is also exhibited mainly in the Yuddhakanda. *Hāsyā rasa* is evident as in the case of Śurpanakhā. *Raudra* (fury) is also seen in Rāvaṇa, *adbhuta* (extraordinary) in Hanumāna, and *śānta* (peace) in the characters of many sages.

### **2. Characters of Morality**

In this Epic, various characters contain the epitome of particular aspects of morality. The author wants to install them in the common masses. Rāma is the character of the highest moral order (*maryādā puruṣottama*). Daśaratha epitomizes a fatherly love. Kauśalyā and Sumitrā display the patience and love of motherly nature. Sumanta is the ideal minister and Mantharā is the ideal faithful servant. Hanumāna is the ideal devotee, Lakṣmaṇa, the ideal brother, and Sīta the ideal wife.

### **3. Human-centric**

In *Rāmāyaṇa* the divine attributes are situated in human form. The divine here



descends in the characters who are normal people of a kingdom. It shows that the divine qualities can be imbibed by human beings also. Such an approach of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is unparalleled in the history of Sanskrit literature. Thus, the spirit of *Rāmāyaṇa* has a humanist dimension as well.

#### 4. *Puruṣārtha* and *Āśrama*

*Puruṣārtha* is the central notion of Indian philosophy and morality. Etymologically, it is derived from the two Sanskrit words, *puruṣa* and *artha*, meaning the purpose of human beings. They are four as *dharma* (righteousness or duty), *artha* (wealth), *kāma* (sensuous fulfillment), and *Mokṣa* (liberation). The epic does not eulogize *artha* and *kāma* but it does not dismiss it as well. They are suggested to be fulfilled within the limits of *dharma*. The primary importance is given to the *dharma* aspect as epitomized in the character of Rāma, Hanumāna, Lakṣmaṇa, Vibhīṣaṇa. *Rāmāyaṇa* depicts the victory of *dharma* over *adharmā*. The epic does not describe much about *Mokṣa* but again does not dismiss its importance.

*Āśramas* are also the founding pillars of *Sanātana dharma*. Though all the *āśramas* are described in the epic but the central focus has been on the *grhastha āśrama dharma* which we find in Rāma's management of his kingdom and family affairs.

#### 5. Metaphoric Suggestions

Besides moral and aesthetic importance, saints and philosophers down the ages have tried to derive a suggested meaning (metaphor) of the story of *Rāmāyaṇa*. For instance, Vivekananda interprets it in an Advaitic sense where Rāma is seen as the Supreme *Brahman*, Sīta is seen as *jīvātmā* (the individual soul), and Laṅkā is illustrated as a human body. The *jīvātma* which is engaged in the body of Laṅkā always desires to meet her Supreme Lord (*Brahman*). The only hindrance is that of *rākṣasas* or our evil character traits. Vibhīṣaṇa represents the *sattva guṇa* (auspicious qualities), Rāvaṇa represents the *rajoguṇa* or our ego, and Kumbhakarāṇa represents the *tamoguṇa* or the inertia. Hanumāna is seen as the guru or the vital force of *jīva* by which the soul remembers God and God in turn comes and saves the *jīvātman* by killing the ego of Rāvaṇa.

#### 2. *The Mahābhārata*

The second great epic (*Mahākāvya*) after the *Rāmāyaṇa* is the *Mahābhārata*, which literally denotes a battle name that took place in Kurukṣetra some 5000 years ago. If the *Rāmāyaṇa* is the *adi kāvya* of Sanskrit then *Mahābhārata* is the first historical epic (*itihāsa kāvya*) of India. According to 'The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Hinduism', the *Mahābhārata* is the longest epic or text in the history of mankind. It contains over one lakh *ślokas* (verses) and over 1.8 million words and is roughly ten times the length of *Odyssey* and *Iliad* combined. Scholars like WJ Johnson have also compared it with the Bible, the Quran and the works of Homer and Shakespeare. In Indian tradition, it is also called the fifth *Veda* or *viśva kośa* (the treasure of world knowledge).

#### Texture of the *Mahābhārata*

As stated above, the *Mahābhārata* consists of over one lakh *ślokas*. It was composed by Vyasa with the help of god Gaṇeśa. In its chapters, it contains

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stories within stories. Further, it is composed of 18 *parvas* (books) and then further sub-*parvas* (or sub-chapters), viz., as follows:

1. **Ādi Parva** – As the name suggests, it delineates the origin of the *Mahābhārata*, the race of Bharat, and Bhṛgu.
2. **Sabhā Parva** – It depicts the life of the court of Indraprastha, the yajña (sacrifice) of Yudhiṣṭhira, the game of dice, disrobing of Draupadī and the exile of the Pāṇḍavas.
3. **Vana Parva** – It describes the twelve years of exile of the Pāṇḍavas.
4. **Virāṭa Parva** – It describes the incognito lives of the Pāṇḍavas at the court of Virāṭa.
5. **Udyoga Parva** – ‘*Ugdyoga*’ means efforts and here it signifies the attempts and efforts made to avoid war between Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas.
6. **Bhīṣma Parva** – Herein commences the great battle and it describes the heroic performance of Bhīṣma in the battlefield and eventually his fall on the bed of arrows. This *parva* also contains the world famous *Bhagavad-Gīta* - the Song of the Lord.
7. **Droṇa Parva** – It describes the performance and death of Droṇācārya at the battlefield including other martyrs.
8. **Karṇa Parva** – It describes the heroic performance of Karṇa, the son of Kuntī.
9. **Śalya Parva** – It depicts the last day of the battle as Śalya being the Commander in chief. It also described the duel between Bhīma and Duryodhana which ended the war.
10. **Sauptika Parva** – It describes how Aśvathāmā, Kṛpā, and Kṛtavarmā kill the remaining Pāṇḍava’s army during their sleep leaving only seven warriors on the Pāṇḍavas and three on the side of Kauravas.
11. **Strī Parva** – It depicts the lamenting of Gāndhārī who curses Kṛṣṇa for the destruction of Kauravas.
12. **Śānti Parva** – It depicts the coronation of Bhīṣma.
13. **Anuśāsana Parva** – It includes the final commands or instructions (*anuśāsana*) given to Yudhiṣṭhira by Bhīṣma.
14. **Aśvamedhika Parva** – It describes the *aśvamedha* yajña of Yudhiṣṭhira, the conquests of Arjuna and the speech of Anu-*Gīta* by Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna.
15. **Āśramavāsika Parva** – It describes the death of Dhritarashtra, Kunti, and Gandhari in a Himalayan hermitage.
16. **Mausala Parva** – It describes the materialization of Gāndhārī’s curse with the destruction of Kṛṣṇa’s race of Yādavas/Yaduvaṅśa.
17. **Mahāprasthānika Parva** – It describes the great journey of the Padavas and Draupadi towards the Himalayas.

**18. Svargārohaṇa Parva** – It describes the ultimate ascent of the Pāṇḍavas to *svarga* (heaven).

In addition to these 18 parvas, there is a chapter named Harivaṁsa Parva as an appendage, which describes the life of Kṛṣṇa, not covering the eighteen chapters.

### Philosophical Underpinnings of the *Mahābhārata*

Again, *Mahābhārata* is not just a story for a recreational purpose; rather it is a great narrative or epic on fundamental philosophical issues of *Sanātana Dharma*. Some of the philosophical foundations can be explained as follows:

#### 1. *Puruṣārtha*

The meaning and importance of *Puruṣārtha* has been already stated above. The *Mahābhārata* also portrays characters who exhibit excellence in *Puruṣārtha*, for instance, in the life Karna, Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa, Bhīma, Bhīṣma, etc. Yudhiṣṭhira is also portrayed as dharmarāja, i.e., the king (guardian) of Dharma. The ascent of Pāṇḍavas to *svarga* (heaven) highlights the importance of *Mokṣa* as the final aim of life.

#### 2. Law of *Karma*

Numerous stories of the *Mahābhārata* also illustrate the importance and efficacy of the law of *Karma*, which simply says what is sowed, is reaped. It is the application of causality in the realm of action. For instance, Duryodhana and Kauravas have to pay for their wrong deed of disrobing Draupadi in the battlefield and when Bhīma kills Duryodhana. Great *ācāryas* also, who take the side of immorality, like Bhīṣma, also had to pay as per their *karma*. The law of *Karma* also supervenes the god-head authorities such as Kṛṣṇa who is cursed by Gāndhāri and eventually his race of Yadavas is devastated. Thus, the law of *karma* is the sole regulator of the entire narrative of the *Mahābhārata*.

#### 3. The *Bhagavad-Gīta* and its Philosophy

The full-fledged philosophy of the times of the *Mahābhārata* is encapsulated in the *Bhagavad-Gīta* or the song of the Lord dispensed to Arjuna in the battlefield in the Bhishma Parva of the *Mahābhārata*. It is composed of 700 verses divided into eighteen chapters.

The *Bhagavad-Gīta* is one of the major scriptures of Vedānta, and all its seeds can be found in it. For instance, Adī Śaṅkarācārya has derived the path of Knowledge (*jñāna*) from it. Vaiṣṇavite scholars like Rāmānuja, Nimbārka, Madhva, and Vallabha have derived the importance of *bhakti* or the path of devotion from it. Scholars like Tilak derive the importance of *niṣkāma karma* (selfless action) from it. Some scholars like Gandhi and Vivekananda have derived the philosophy of *samanvaya yoga* from it, i.e., the path of harmony of action driven by pure knowledge and surrender to God.

The *Bhagavad-Gīta* also institutionalizes the philosophy of social structure of *varṇa* and *āśrama dhama*. When Arjuna is reluctant to fight in the battlefield or was inclined to take the path renunciation, Kṛṣṇa teaches him the path action rather than renunciation. The path of renunciation was contrary to his *svadharma*

(intrinsic nature) as he was a warrior (*kṣatriya*). Kṛṣṇa emphatically says that to die in one's *svadharma* is greater than to live with the *dharma* of someone else.

Hence, the *Bhagavad-Gīta* presents a synoptic picture of the philosophy of *Vedas*, *Upaniṣads*, and *Purāṇas* through the words of Śri Kṛṣṇa.

#### **4. Metaphoric Suggestions**

Philosophers like Mahatma Gandhi have contended that the battle of *Mahābhārata* never took place historically. It is merely an allegory given by Vyasa who wanted to preach certain core messages of Hinduism, like self-less action based on *varṇa* and *āśrama* systems. For Gandhi, the *Mahābhārata* is the state of mind of each and every individual. Kauravas are the negative forces and Pāṇḍavas the *sātvic* (positive) forces. The chariot of Kṛṣṇa also symbolizes the human condition where Arjuna is the *jīvātmana*, horses are the *indriyas* (sense organs) and Kṛṣṇa, the charioteer is the Supreme Lord. The state of dilemma posed by Arjuna is the state of mind of every individual and the path of happiness is following one's *svadharma*. Gandhi, however, also emphasized the futility of violence as the war of the *Mahābhārata* did not bring peace but only remorse and regret. However, at the same time he adores the embodiment of Kṛṣṇa as wisdom and deeply appreciated the *Bhagavad-Gīta*. In his own words-

“The *Bhagavad-Gīta* is the universal mother. She turns away nobody. Her door is wide open to anyone who knocks. A true votary of the *Bhagavad-Gīta* does not know what disappointment is. He ever dwells in perennial joy and peace that passeth understanding. However, that peace and joy come not to a skeptic or to him who is proud of his intellect or learning. It is reserved only for the humble in spirit who brings to her worship a fullness of faith and an undivided singleness of mind.”

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### **3.4 PHILOSOPHICAL RESPONSE**

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Philosophy of Epics (*Mahākāvya*) and the Indian culture and life are intimately connected. People might not be well versed in the *Mahābhārata* or the *Rāmāyaṇa* in scholastic terms yet their life's basic principles reflect the philosophical teachings of these epics. Often the epics like *Rāmāyaṇa* have been reformulated into vernacular languages. One such example is Tulsīdās's *Rāmacaritamānasa* which have moved the hearts and sentiments of millions of people. The following is a summative account of the philosophical response and the influences of the two great epics of India:

#### **1. Genesis of Epic (*Mahākāvya*)**

Scholars have deciphered the genesis of epics in *karuṇa rasa* (compassion and piety). For instance, when Vālmīki saw the death of a bird while it was engaged in love and the subsequent lamenting of the alive bird, his heart was filled with compassion and grief. He spontaneously uttered a verse which was lyrical, metrical, and full of poetic skills. Afterwards, Brahmā himself suggested him to compose the *Rāmāyaṇa* – as the first epic. Hence, a great poetry is sprouted only in a certain state of agony, as Valmiki himself says – ‘*śokaḥ ślokatvamāgataḥ*’. Kālidāsa has also accepted this view when he says, ‘*yasya śokaḥ śloka-tvamāpadyata*’.

## 2. The quest for Beatifism/Bliss

Another purpose of the epics, as already stated, is to evoke certain *rasas* in human beings. Epics or Indian philosophy in general are teleological in nature where it seeks the highest spiritual pleasure and a permanent release from suffering. In this respect, epics begin with the primary *rasas* such *karuṇa*, *vātsalya*, *śringāra*, etc. but it can also culminate in the highest pleasures like *bhāgvada ānanda* through the path of *bhakti*. *Rasa* are, therefore, also called *brahmānanda sahodara* (the twin of the Supreme Bliss).

## 3. Varṇāśrama and Purushartha

The epics have also supported unanimously a social structure based on *varṇa*, viz., *Brāhmin*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, and *śūdra*; and on *āśrama*, viz., *brahmacarya*, *gṛhastha*, *vānaprastha*, and *sanyāsa*. These are the important constituents and stages of a normal human life. Furthermore, during these stages, what one has to achieve is nothing but the four ends of human beings –*puruṣārtha*, viz., *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *Mokṣa*. These elements have shaped the course of Indian philosophy, for instance, as in Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta philosophy.

## 4. Dharma and Adharma

Another core message of the epics is to proclaim the victory of morality (*dharma*) over immorality (*adharma*), and thereby preaching humanity to adhere to the course of *dharma* only; the epics unanimously proclaim *yato dharmah tato jaya*, i.e., where there is *dharma*, there is victory. In *Rāmāyaṇa*, this is observed when Rāma kills Rāvaṇa and with the coronation of Rāma and Vibhīṣaṇa. In the *Mahābhārata*, the same trend is observed with the victory of Pāṇḍavas over Kaurava and with the coronation of Yudhiṣṭhira.

## 5. The Bhagavad-Gīta and its Influence on Indian Philosophy

In praise of the *Bhagavad-Gīta*, a German philosopher, Wilhelm von Humboldt once quoted, “The most beautiful, perhaps the only true philosophical song existing in any known tongue ... perhaps the deepest and loftiest thing the world has to show.” The same is true regarding its influence in Indian philosophy in general and Vedānta in particular. The *Bhagavad-Gīta* is one of the *prasthāna trayi* (three great sources) of Vedānta. All the schools of Vedānta, be it *kevalādvaita* of Śaṅkara, *viśiṣṭādvaita* of Rāmānuja, or *dvaita* of Madhva, all claim their systems to be faithfully derived from the *Bhagavad-Gīta*.

### Check Your Progress II

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Comment on the characters of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as moral ideals.

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2. Describe briefly the philosophy of *Bhagvad Gīta*.

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### 3.5 LET US SUM UP

We have observed how Indian *kāvya* culminated in the *Mahākāvya* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. We have also seen how they both are grand and heroic not only in terms of its volume and poetic qualities but also regarding its philosophical texture. *Rāmāyaṇa* has one protagonist, i.e., Rāma but *Mahābhārata* has many like Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa, and Yudhiṣṭhira. However, all of them portray an ideal character such as having courage, wisdom, devotion, etc. Ultimately, there turns out to be a victory of *dharma* over *adharma*. The chief significance of the epics like the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* lies in the sense that it propagates the deep, abstract and sometimes harsh truth of philosophy as sugarcoated by poetry which is easily accessible to and imbibed by a common person.

### 3.6 KEY WORDS

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| <b>Kāvya</b>          | : Poetry in ancient India with highly Sanskrit literary skills.  |
| <b>Mahākāvya</b>      | : Great poetry of ancient India with great Sanskrit skills and voluminous in size.   |
| <b>Chanda/Chhanda</b> | : It is a kind of quatrain (four stanza) used in the poetic tradition of ancient India.  |
| <b>Rasa</b>           | : Rasa is a kind joy or sense of beauty evoked by encountering any piece of art or literature.   |
| <b>Beatifism</b>      | : The view that maximizing spiritual pleasure/happiness is the supreme goal of life.   |
| <b>Vedānta</b>        | : It represents the teaching based on <i>prasthāntraya</i> , the three great sources (texts), namely, the <i>Upaniṣads</i> , the <i>Bhagavad-Gīta</i> , and the <i>Brahmasūtra</i> . |
| <b>Teleology</b>      | : Explanation of a thing based on <i>telos</i> , i.e., purpose or end.   |
| <b>Puruṣārtha</b>     | : It means the virtues or duties of human beings. They are four- <i>dharma</i> (duty), <i>artha</i> (wealth), <i>kāma</i> (pleasures), and <i>Mokṣa</i> (liberation).                |

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### 3.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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#### Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. The term epic is derived from the Greek and Latin words like ‘*epikos*’ and ‘*epicus*’ respectively meaning – a tale, story, prophecy, proverb or poetry in a large form. *Kāvya* is the creation of a poet (*kavi*) is *kāvya* (*kaveḥ karma kāvyam*) and it must be able to evoke a certain *rasa* (joy) in the heart of the perceiver or reader. *Kāvya*, in its grand form, is called *Mahākāvya* and it has characteristics as it should commence in a bliss dispensing tone (*aśīrvādātmaka*), a mood of submission to the Divine (*namaskārātmaka*) and should hint at the subject matter (*vastunirdeśātmaka*). Its plot (*kathānaka*) should not be purely fictitious but based on the ancient historic records or on *Purāṇa* tradition.
2. *Kāvya*s in Sanskrit literature originate in the earliest poetic hymns (*sūkta*) of the Ṛgveda. Uṣā Sūkta is an excellent example of Vedic *kāvya*. In the later developments of *Vedas*, as in *Brāhmaṇa*, *Āraṇyaka*, and *Upaniṣads* also, *kavyas* were scattered in poetic and dialogue form. Hence, the seeds of *kāvya* or *Mahākāvya* were present but not fully germinated. Epic as a *Mahākāvya* in its proper sense begins with the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Valmiki and the *Mahābhārata* of Vyasa. Later on, the tradition was carried forward by authors like Ashvaghosa, Kalidasa, Bharavi, Maagha, Sriharsha, etc.

#### Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. The term ‘*Rāmāyaṇa*’ comes from the two Sanskrit words – ‘*rama*’ and ‘*ayana*’ meaning the path or the place of Rāma. In *Rāmāyaṇa*, various characters contain the epitome of particular aspects of morality. The author wants to install them in the common masses. Rāma is the character of the

## Introduction to Indian Philosophy

highest moral order (*maryādā puruṣottama*). Daśaratha epitomizes a fatherly love. Kauśalyā and Sumitrā display the patience and love of motherly nature. Sumanta is the ideal minister and Mantharā is the ideal faithful servant. Hanumāna is the ideal devotee, Lakṣmaṇa, the ideal brother, and Sīta the ideal wife.

2. The *Bhagavad-Gīta* encapsulates the philosophy of the times of *Mahābhārata*. It has the philosophy of *jñāna*, *karma*, and *bhakti yoga*. Adi Shankaracharya has derived the path of Knowledge (*jñāna*) from it. Vaishnavite scholars like Rāmānuja, Nimbārka, Madhva, and Vallabha have derived the importance of *bhakti* or the path of devotion from it. Scholars like Tilak have derived the importance of *niškāma karma* (selfless action) from it. It also contains the philosophy of social structure of *varṇa* and *āśrama dhama*.



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## UNIT 4 NĀSTIKA AND ĀSTIKA DARŚANA\*

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### Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 An Overview
- 4.3 Reflection on the Core Issues/Concepts
- 4.4 Philosophical Response
- 4.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.6 Key Words
- 4.7 Further Readings and References
- 4.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 4.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this Unit, you are expected to know the following:

- the meaning of Darśana
- the meaning of the term āstika and nāstika in Indian Philosophy
- the basis of the division of the Indian Philosophical Schools.
- the notion of Puruṣārtha
- the styles of Indian philosophical literature
- an overview of āstika darśanas
- an overview of nāstika darśanas

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the Indian philosophical tradition, no philosopher or philosophical system comes in isolation for they have to adhere to some of the schools of Indian philosophy. Such allegiance is based on the proclivity of the thinker to a particular frame of mind and understanding, known as darśanas. It is derived from the Sanskrit root drik, i.e., to perceive or to have a vision and it represents a synoptic understanding of the world and human beings. This ancient notion of Darśana as a world-view also corresponds to the Greek and German notions of *kosmotheoriā* and *weltanschauung* respectively. Accordingly, Indian philosophical wisdom consists of two parallel streams, known as āstika and nāstika Darśana based on Vedic and non-Vedic texts respectively. The āstika tradition consists of further six darśanas (thought-system), viz., Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta.

The nāstika tradition consists of further three sub- schools, viz., Buddhism, Jainism, and Cārvāka. In this Unit, we shall try to understand the meaning

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## **4.2 AN OVERVIEW**

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In common parlance, āstika and nāstika would denote a theist and an atheist respectively. However, contrary to this, the terms āstika and nāstika have an entirely different connotation in Indian philosophical context. Etymologically, it either denotes existence (asti) or non-existence (na-asti) of something. Here, the subject of the existence (the predicate) is the sanctity of the *Vedas* or Vedic knowledge. Hence, āstika means accepting the authority of *Vedas* while nāstika means denying or neutralizing the allegiance to *Vedas*.

Now, to understand the basis of such division we need to go back to very roots or basic assumptions and approach of Indian thought. One overriding principle of the entire Indian thought is that it is human-centric. It seeks to alleviate the suffering of human beings and maximize the pleasure or happiness of in its highest possible form. In this sense, Indian philosophy may be deciphered as essentially hedonistic/ beatific and teleological. It is merely the source of inspiration and the way they approach that goal on which they differ.

*Vedas*, from the Saṅskṛt root vid, means to know the light of wisdom. They are the ancient most texts of Indian philosophy and of utmost sanctity as they are revealed by Īśvara to the Indian seer known as Ṛṣis. However, some schools also consider *Vedas* to be apauruṣeya, i.e., non- personal yet the text of purest knowledge and the highest veneration. In any case, those who believe that *Vedas* consist of the Ultimate Truth and is thus capable of dispensing human beings from suffering forever are known as the followers of āstika Darśana. Traditionally, there are six systems of āstika darśanas, viz, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta. Though they have dissenting views and approaches yet all of them, unanimously accept the authority of the *Vedas*.

On the other hand, those who drift away from the Vedic system of knowledge are known as the followers of nāstika Darśana. Within them also there is a subtle but important division. One group consists of Jainism and Buddhism. They also contend that the Ultimate Truth or Enlightenment can be attained, but there is no necessary condition of following the *Vedas*. Liberation from suffering is possible even without *Vedas*. The possible reason could have been either the dysfunctional and corrupted status of *Vedas* or the zeal of a fresh start of philosophizing and solving the human problem without adhering to *Vedas*. Hence, we find that initially Jainism and Buddhism were more or less neutral about *Vedas* and restricting their concerns purely to the pursuit of Truth and happiness. Accordingly, the Buddhist and Jainist ideals culminated in Nirvāṇa and Kaivalya respectively.

The other group of nāstika Darśana consists of the exceptional case of Cārvāka. They vehemently reject the authority of *Vedas*. They are also critical of Jainism and Buddhism. Cārvākas have no leaning towards any metaphysical speculation. For them, there is no Mokṣa or liberation. Notwithstanding the impossibility of rebirth and the law of Karma, the sole aim of life is to maximize human pleasures. For them, kāma (pleasure) is the parama Puruṣārtha (the highest attainment). Ontologically, Cārvāka is a materialist philosophy denying the

existence of God, soul, heavenly places, rituals, etc. Thus, we can see how the overriding principle in all the darśanas is the same, i.e., the alleviation of human suffering or positively the attainment of supreme happiness. Yet, they differ in respect of the allegiance to certain texts and in the outcomes of their pursuit of truth and happiness. This point is further explained in the next section along with a brief explanation of the core concepts of all the major darśanas.

### Check Your Progress I

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What is the meaning of āstika and nāstika Darśana?

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2. How within the nāstika tradition, Cārvāka is different from Jainism and Buddhism?

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## 4.3 REFLECTION ON THE CORE ISSUES/ CONCEPTS

We have seen how no philosopher in India comes in isolation. He/she has some predilections towards certain set of philosophical attitude known as darśanas. Āstika and nāstika are the two traditional divisions of Indian darśanas. We have also reflected on the basis of such division being the authority of *Vedas*. Still, a more in-depth look on the genus (sameness) and differentia (differences) of such division is required which is as follows:

### A. The Notion of Puruṣārtha-

To understanding the āstika and nāstika division more profoundly, we need to understand the ancient philosophical notion of Puruṣārtha. Puruṣārtha, from the Sanskrit root Puruṣa (human/soul) and artha (function), means the purpose of human beings. It is the teleological explanation of being human. Traditionally, as per Vedic philosophy, there are four Puruṣārthas, viz, dharma, artha, kāma, and mokṣa meaning righteousness, wealth, sensuous satisfaction, and the supreme liberation respectively. The nāstika darśanas have dissenting attitude and views on the notion of purusharthta which become the basis of their division.

**B. Genus and Differentia of Āstika Darśanas-**

All the six darśanas have the genus or sameness of accepting the authority of *Vedas*. Further, all of them accept all the four Puruṣārthas and highest being Mokṣa. However, they have different terms for Mokṣa such as apvarga, niḥśreyasa, Samādhi, turīyavasthā, etc.

All the āstika darśanas have differentia in many aspects. As noted above, they give their own theory of the Parama Puruṣārtha with different nomenclature. Metaphysically, epistemologically, and axiologically also they have slight variations in their philosophies for they have different interpretations of *Vedas*. Last, these darśanas also differ in their specializations. For instance, Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, and Mīmāṃsā have their specializations in cosmology/ evolution, psychology, reasoning, physics, and Vedic rituals respectively.

**C. Genus and Differentia of Nāstika Darśanas-**

All the nāstika darśanas are similar in the sense that they do not have any allegiance towards *Vedas*. However, they differ regarding the degree of condemnation of *Vedas*. Jainism and Buddhism, on the one hand, partially reject *Vedas*, thus having a constructive or a soft criticism of *Vedas*. Cārvāka, on the other hand, vehemently rejects the authority and the entire outlook of *Vedas*. They only accept the first two Puruṣārthas, viz., artha and kāma, and the latter being the Supreme end of human existence. Jainism and Buddhism, on the other hand, have a transcendental foundation. Contrary to the hedonistic attitude towards life, they have the elements of asceticism. Accordingly, we can say that for Jainism and Buddhism the Parama Puruṣārtha would be dharma and mokṣa only.

**D. Corpus of Indian Philosophical Literature-**

All the schools of āstika and nāstika darśanas (except Cārvāka) have developed a huge corpus of philosophical literature which can be divided into two major groups or approaches, viz., Sūtra and Vyākhyā. Sūtra śailī (Sūtra Style) is the way of aphorism whereas aphorisms are short, condensed, and cryptic statements of Truth. All the darśanas have one or few Sūtra style text/s propounded by their respective founders. Being cryptic in nature, they are open to diverse interpretation. Hence, the second style of literature is called vyākhyā śailī, i.e., the way of exegesis, which are explanatory commentaries on the Sūtra literature. Technically these commentaries are called bhāṣya, tīka, tātparya tīka, etc. Together, they all constitute a vast corpus of Indian philosophical literature.

**E. The Need of Ṣaḍ Darśanas-**

Ṣaḍ Darśanas are the six systems of āstika darśan based on Vedic Tradition. Here, it is pertinent to understand how they originate with Vedic foundation and in what conditions. *Vedas*, as stated earlier, exhibit the supreme embodiment of Knowledge. *Vedas* come in four parts- *mantras*, *brāhmaṇa*, *āraṇyaka*, and *Upaniṣads* meaning hymns, injunctions, forest wisdom, and philosophical wisdom respectively. Their language (old esoteric Sanskrit) is uniquely accessible to the men of highest spiritual and moral caliber. There are six Vedāṅgas (auxiliary disciplines) which one needs to master before he/she can venture into the subtleties of *Vedas*. These six Vedāṅgas (six limbs) are śikṣā,

vyākaraṇa, chanda, nirukta, jyotiṣa, and kalpa meaning phonetics, grammar, the science of meters, etymological science, astrology, and religious injunctions respectively. This complex structure of Vedic pre-requirements made *Vedas* inaccessible to a layman. Therefore, from time to time at different places of the Indian subcontinent, many realized souls encapsulated the entire Vedic wisdom in a particular set of philosophy, called darśanas such as Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Vedānta, etc. Thus, different ṣaḍ darśanas also known as Upāṅga (the six sub-limbs) of *Vedas*, came into existence.

## **F. The Six Āstika Darśanas**

Following is an overview of the core philosophical concepts of the six āstika darśanas, their founders, and the key texts:

### **1 Sāṅkhya-**

Sāṅkhya is possibly the oldest of all the āstika darśanas; founded by Sage Kapila before 500 BC. *Sāṅkhya Sūtra* is the foundational aphoristic text of Sāṅkhya Darśana. Sāṅkhya aims to alleviate human suffering by the knowledge of two ultimate principles, viz., Prakṛti and Puruṣa denoting unconscious and conscious elements respectively. Sāṅkhya is dualist and follows the doctrine of realism or real causation in the form of Satkāryavāda. It says that the effect preexists in the cause. Hence, entire evolution ensues from Prakṛti (having sattva, rajas, and tamas) and Puruṣa while their dissolution and unique transcendental realization is Mokṣa.

### **2. Yoga-**

It is the practical aspect of Sāṅkhya with a specialization of the philosophy of mind and higher states of the human psyche. Yoga Darśana was founded by sage Patañjali in his great compilation known as *Yoga Sūtra*. It aims to control and pacify several modifications of the human psyche. In this pursuit, it develops an eight fold path (aṣṭāṅga yoga) beginning with moral constraints (yama and niyama) end ending with trance states of Samadhi.

### **3. Nyāya-**

Nyāya was founded by sage Gotama in his text- *Nyāya Sūtra*. It specializes in the science of reasoning. However, the grand claim of Nyāya is to provide the supreme happiness (apavarga) by understanding the sixteen philosophical concepts such as knowledge, god, soul, pain, doubt, etc. Throughout centuries, the Nyāya system has meticulously developed the science of reasoning or logical thinking.

### **4. Vaiśeṣika –**

Vaiśeṣika Darśana was founded by the sage Kaṇāda. Its authoritative text is *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra*. Again, akin to Nyāya, its aim is *apvarga*. However, it specializes in sciences of physics or substance and predicates. It adds seven more substances/ concepts to the sixteen concepts floated by Nyāya. Vaiśeṣika adheres to the philosophy of atomism and pluralistic realism.

### **5. Mīmāṃsā-**

It was founded by sage Jaimini in his masterpiece- *Jaimini Sūtra*. Mīmāṃsā is

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hermeneutical in the sense that it prescribes the rules of interpretation of Vedic statements and injunctions. Its chief focus is to follow Vedic rituals at various stages of human life. It concerns itself to the mantra and brahmana portion of *Vedas* which consists of hymns and ritualistic injunctions respectively. Therefore, this Darśana is also called Pūrva Mīmāṃsā. Two other great proponents of Mīmāṃsā were Kumārila and Prabhākara.

### 6. Vedānta-

Vedānta represents the final teachings based on *Upaniṣads* which were the crux contemplation of Rishis dwelling in forests. The other two great sources of Vedānta are *Bhagavad Gīta* and Brahmasutra. The latter was authored by sage Badrayana Vyasa. Together these three texts are called Prasthāna Trayi. Vedānta teaches the realization of divinity of Atman and Brahman, with the help of certain doctrines, for instance, the doctrine of three states of Consciousness, the doctrine of three bodies, the doctrine of five sheaths, etc. On Prasthānatrayi arose many commentaries giving rise to various schools of Vedānta such as Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, Dvaita, Dvaitādvaita, etc. A summative account of these sub-schools of Vedānta is given at the end.

### G- The Three Nāstika Darśana-

#### 1. Jainism –

It was founded by enlightened sages known as Tīrthaṅkaras. Vardhamān Mahāvīra (5th BCE) was the 24th and the last Tīrthaṅkara of Jainism and Ṛṣabhadeva being the first. *Āgama Suttas* are the oldest texts of Jainism. The chief doctrines of Jainism are anekantavada (the theory of relative viewpoints), saptabhaṅgīnaya (theory of seven judgments) bondage through *puḍgalas* (materialistic) and *karmas*. Through strict penance, Jainism proposes the path of liberation of soul through samyaka - jñāna, caritra, and Darśana meaning right knowledge, right conduct, and right vision respectively.

#### 2. Buddhism -

It was founded by Gautama, the Buddha in 5th BCE. *Tripitaka* and *Dhammapada* are some of the ancient texts of Buddhism. Buddhism was utterly pragmatic and human centric contrary to the prevailing tendencies of metaphysical abstractions. Buddhism can be encapsulated in its doctrine of the Four Noble Truths-

1. There exists suffering; 2. there is a cause of suffering; 3. If the cause is removed, the effect will also be removed and hence there is the state of Nirvāṇa; 4. there is a path to Nirvāṇa. The Buddhist path consists of moral asceticism and renunciation of all kinds of desires and cravings. Other pillars of Buddhism are the practice of non- violence, compassion, and celibacy. There are three main schools of Buddhism- the realist school of Sarvāstivāda and Vaibhāṣika; the absolutist school of Mādhyamika; the idealist school of Vijñānavāda.

#### 3. Cārvāka

Cārvāka represents the common sense philosophy of egoistic hedonism. It is materialist also in nature. Its founder was Bṛhaspati or Cārvāka. The ancient most texts are *Bṛhaspati Sūtra* and *Tattvoppalavasimha*. However, since this is the least popular Darśana and hence it developed in small proportions and without

any authoritative texts. Nevertheless, its chief doctrines are of materialism, no heaven/hell, hedonism, perception being the only valid source of knowledge, skepticism, etc. Cārvāka despises the concept of Mokṣa and hence radically drifts away from the Vedic āstika and the other two nāstika darśanas.

#### 4.4 PHILOSOPHICAL RESPONSE

There is no certainty regarding the origin and span of these schools. However, it is believed that any philosopher or philosophical system that arose in India adhered to either of these darśanas. For instance, Vivekananda and Aurobindo Ghosh belonged to the Vedānta tradition of āstika darśanas. Modern-day ISCKON is an offshoot achintya bhedābheda school of Vedānta. It is a popular view that hardly any philosopher in Indian came in isolation owing to the diversity of āstika and nāstika darśanas.

If this division is real, then we should understand the advantages and disadvantages of this division. There are certain advantages and disadvantages of such a division of Indian philosophy. The advantages accrue in the form of diversity, a plethora of interpretation, multiple ways of attainment, flexibility, different specializations, readymade assimilation of a lifestyle, etc. Disadvantages come in the form of bitterness and antagonism ensuing from the conflicting and contradictory views, authoritativeness, lack of novelty, rigidity, etc. Despite such hurdles, Indian philosophy as a whole has been influential in all walks of intellectual spheres. Owing to such division, a passionate scholar finds it easy to comprehend Indian aspects such as of cosmology, psychology, logical framework, rules of interpretation, and *ātmavidyā* in Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta respectively. Jainism and Buddhism also offer a comprehensive and synoptic worldview.

Some people are of the opinion that this division is influenced or started from the word “*Nāstiko Vedanindakah*” of *Manusmṛiti*. However presently we are not concerned with the historical facts and interpretations, but its philosophical interpretations. This division of āstika and nāstika tradition appeared in the *Sarvadarśanasāgraha* of Mādhvācārya of the 12th century. Many modern scholars have pointed out some degree of arbitrariness in his division. Many have also challenged the viability and all-inclusiveness of such division.

The distinction of *Āstika* and *Nāstika* is not acceptable to all. Some scholars believe that this division is a result of writings on the history of Indian philosophy and these writings did not do a deep survey to establish this division. Their claim is superficial. We find opinions against this distinction not only in writings of modern philosophers like Daya Krishna but in tradition as well. For example, Sāṅkhya philosophy is called non-vedic philosophy, while the division considers it in Vedic tradition. One of the reasons why Sāṅkhya is called non-vedic is that it has formed reasoning its basis. Sāṅkhya maintains that *puruṣas* are many in number, now for its accomplishment, Sāṅkhya provides the reasoning that one birth does not lead to the birth of all, and death of any one person does not result in death of all, etc. It shows that *puruṣas* are many not one. Similarly we can consider another example of Buddhist, which is called an atheist school, Buddhist philosopher Dharmakīrti says that we (Buddhists) should not be considered atheists because we believe in the other world (*parlok*; *Swargādi*). It can be considered from this that the word atheist has not been

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related to *Vedas* in the philosophical tradition. Other meanings of this have also been there like belief-disbelief in the heaven (*parlok*), belief-disbelief in the being of God, belief-disbelief in the existence of the soul.

Philosopher Daya Krishna, while considering this, finds that the theist philosophies also have different views regarding the authority and validity of the *Vedas*. As the Nyāya philosophy never quotes the *Veda-vākyas* as evidence for its philosophical grounds. Vaiśeṣika philosophy does not regard *śabda* as a means of knowledge. The Mīmāṃsā philosophy considers the injunction (*vidhi*) prohibition (*niṣedha*) in the *Vedas* and establishes the rules of interpretation sutras in order for how to perform a *yajña*; in the absence of one thing, which other thing will be in accordance with the *Vedas*, etc. and also establishes authorlessness/impersonal (*apauruṣeytā*) of the *Vedas*. On the other hand, Vedānta (specifically Śāṅkaravedānta) accepts only the last part of the *Vedas* as means in his philosophy and presents the statements of *Upaniṣads* to prove his philosophical beliefs. Apart from these, there are no differences in the interpretation of the *Vedas* in the orthodox Schools; in fact most of them have not even made any attempt to explain the *Veda*. We find that there is hardly any philosophical system other than the Vedānta School which grounds its theory on the interpretation of the *Vedas*.

In this way, while accepting the usefulness of this division, we will also keep in mind the problems or objections related to this division.

### Check Your Progress II

- Note:**
- a) Use the space provided for your answer
  - b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) Comment on the two styles of the Indian philosophical texts.

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2) Describe briefly *Upaniṣads* as the source of Vedānta.

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## 4.5 LET US SUM UP

We have seen how Indian philosophy has been pragmatic and anthropocentric. It is based on the teleological explanation of the human beings where there is a cessation of suffering and the attainment of happiness. Cārvāka adheres to purely hedonistic basis of an ethical life while all other darśanas transcend the gross materialism and guarantee spiritual solace. In this pursuit, āstika darśanas



followed the legacy of *Vedas* while Buddhism and Jainism grew independently. The following tables present a summative account of various darśanas, the key texts, and the key schools.

## Nāstika and Āstika Darśana

### Bhāratīya Darśana

| Āstika Darśanas | Nāstika Darśanas |
|-----------------|------------------|
| Sāṅkhya         | Cārvāka          |
| Yoga            | Jainism          |
| Nyāya           | Buddhism         |
| Vaiśeṣika       |                  |
| Mīmāṃsā         |                  |
| Vedānta         |                  |

Table 1. Āstika and Nāstika Darśanas

### Āstika Darśanas

| Darśanas              | Founder/Propounder            | Key Text/s                                       |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| Sāṅkhya               | Kapila                        | Sāṅkhya Sūtra                                    |
| Nyāya                 | Gotama                        | Nyāya Sūtra                                      |
| Vaiśeṣika             | Kaṇāda                        | Vaiśeṣika Sūtra                                  |
| Yoga                  | Patañjali                     | Yoga Sūtra                                       |
| Mīmāṃsā               | Jaimini                       | Jaimini Sūtra                                    |
| Vedānta/Uttar Mīmāṃsā | Upāniṣadic Ṛṣis and Bādrāyaṇa | <i>Upāniṣads, Bhagavad Gīta, and Brahmasūtra</i> |

Table 2. Āstika Darśanas

### Schools of Vedānta

| Schools             | Founder              | Texts                    |
|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Advaita             | Śaṅkara              | Śārīraka Bhāṣya          |
| Viśiṣṭādvaita       | Rāmānuja             | Śri Bhāṣya               |
| Dvaita              | Madhava              | Purṇa Prajña Bhāṣya      |
| Dvaitādvaita        | Nimbārka             | Vedānta Pārijāta Saurabh |
| Śuddhādvaita        | Vallabha             | Aṇu Bhāṣya               |
| Achintya Bhedābheda | Chaitanya Mahaprabhu | Govinda Bhāṣya           |

Table 3 The Schools of Vedānta

### Schools of Buddhism

| Schools                     | Philosophical Position  | Texts          |
|-----------------------------|---|----------------|
| Sarvāstivāda/<br>Vaibhāṣika | Realism/ Quasi Realism<br>(The means to know external world is perception; Bāhya pratyakṣavāda) | Abhidamma Kośa |

|                            |   |   |
|----------------------------|---|---|
| Sautāntrika/<br>Sūtravādin | Realism<br>(External world can<br>be known through<br>Inference; Bāhya-<br>anumeyavāda) | Kalpanāmaṇḍiṭīkā,<br>Abhidharmakośakārikā                           |
| Mādhyamika                 | Absolutism/ Nihilism  | Mūla Mādhyamika<br>Kārikā, Laṅkāvatāra<br>Sūtra, Hṛdaya Sūtra, etc. |
| Yogācāra<br>Vijñānavāda    | Yogic Discipline/<br>Idealism   | Yogācārabhūmiśāstra,<br>Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi,<br>etc.              |

Table 4 Schools of Buddhism

## 4.6 KEY WORDS

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Absolutism</b>          | : The belief in an all-inclusive Ultimate authority, for instance Brahman, Śūnya, Śiva, etc.  |
| <b>Āstika</b>              | : Literally denoting the non-existence of something. In the present context, it is the denial of the authority of <i>Vedas</i> .  |
| <b>Ātman</b>               | : the immanent and transcendental state of Consciousness. It is at par with the Lord or Nirguna Brahman. It is represented by the amatra (silence) at the end of                    |
| <b>Hedonism</b>            | : The view that maximizing pleasure/happiness is the supreme goal of life.  |
| <b>Idealism</b>            | : Ontological reduction of entire world into some form of Consciousness or Idea/Mind.   |
| <b>Mokṣa</b>               | : the Ultimate end/ liberation of human beings.   |
| <b>Nāstika</b>             | : Literally denoting the non-existence of something. In the present context, it is the denial of the authority of <i>Vedas</i> .  |
| <b>Nihilism</b>            | : Denial of all though categories/ linguistic concepts.   |
| <b>Pañca Kośa</b>          | : The five sheaths of human personality, as explained in Taittirīya and other <i>Upaniṣads</i> . They are, namely, annamaya, prāṇamaya, manomaya, vijñānamaya, and ānandamaya kośa. |
| <b>Principal Upaniṣads</b> | : these are also called mukhya <i>Upaniṣads</i> , widely studied in Vedānta philosophy.   |

Shankaracharya wrote commentaries on them. Generally, they are ten in numbers, namely- Īśā (IsUp), Yajurveda, Kena (KeUp), Sāmaveda, Kaṭha (KaUp), Yajurveda, Praśna (PrUp), Atharvaveda, Muṇḍaka (MuUp), Atharvaveda, Māṇḍūkya (MaUp), Atharvaveda, Taittirīya (TaiUp), Yajurveda, Aitareya, (AiUp), Ṛgveda, Chāndogya (ChhUp), Sāmaveda, and Brhadāranyaka (BrUp), Yajurveda.

|                          |   |  |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Puruṣārtha</b>        | : | It means the virtues or duties of human beings. They are four- dharma (duty), artha (wealth), kāma (pleasures), and Mokṣa (liberation).                                |
| <b>Realism</b>           | : | The belief in a real external world existing independent of human mind.  |
| <b>Śarīra Traya</b>      | : | The three bodies of human beings explained in <i>Upaniṣads</i> , namely, sthūla, sukṣma, and kāraṇa śarīra representing gross, subtle, and causal levels respectively. |
| <b>Teleology</b>         | : | Explanation of a thing based on telos, i.e., purpose or end.   |
| <b>Transcendentalism</b> | : | Belief in the existence and possibility of the experience of metaphysical realms.  |
| <b>Vedānta</b>           | : | It represents the teaching based on prasthāntraya, the three great sources (texts), namely, <i>Upaniṣads</i> , <i>Bhagavad Gīta</i> , and <i>Brahmasūtra</i> .         |

#### **4.7 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES**

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## **4.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

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### **Answers to Check Your Progress I**

1. In common parlance, āstika and nāstika would denote a theist and an atheist respectively. However, contrary to this, the terms āstika and nāstika have entirely different connotation in Indian philosophical context. Etymologically, it either denotes existence (asti) or non-existence (na-asti) of something. Here, the subject of the existence (the predicate) is the sanctity of the *Vedas* or Vedic knowledge. Hence, āstika means accepting the authority of *Vedas* while nāstika means denying or neutralizing the allegiance to *Vedas*. Furthermore, this division is based on a teleological explanation of human beings. Traditionally, there are six systems of āstika darśanas, viz., Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta; and three systems of nāstika Darśana, viz., Jainism, Buddhism, and Cārvāka.

2. Those who drift away from the Vedic system of knowledge are known as the followers of nāstika Darśana. Within the nāstika tradition, there is a subtle but important division. One group consists of Jainism and Buddhism who contend that the Enlightenment can be attained but there is no necessary condition of following the *Vedas*. Liberation from suffering is possible even without *Vedas*. They partially rejected *Vedas* and began a fresh start restricting their concerns purely to the pursuit of Truth and happiness. Accordingly, the Buddhist and Jainist ideals culminated in Nirvāṇa and Kaivalya respectively.

The other group of nāstika Darśana consists of the exceptional case of Cārvāka. They vehemently reject the authority of *Vedas*. They are also critical of Jainism and Buddhism. Cārvākas have no leaning towards any metaphysical speculation. For them, there is no Mokṣa, Nirvāṇa, or Kaivalya. Notwithstanding the impossibility of rebirth and the law of Karma, the sole aim of life is to maximize the human pleasures. For them, kāma (pleasure) is the Parama Puruṣārtha (the highest attainment). Ontologically Cārvāka is a materialist philosophy denying the existence of God, soul, heavenly places, rituals, etc. Thus, we can see how despite coming from the same tradition of nāstika Darśana, Cārvāka is strikingly different from Jainism and Buddhism.

### **Answers to Check Your Progress II**

1. All the schools of āstika and nāstika darśanas (except Cārvāka) have developed a huge corpus of philosophical literature which can be divided into two major groups or approaches- Sūtra and Vyākhyā. Sūtra shailee is the way of aphorisms. Sutras are short, condensed, and cryptic statements of Truth. All the darśanas have one or few Sūtra style text/s propounded or compiled by their respective founders. Being cryptic in nature they are open to diverse interpretation and explanation. The second style of literature is called vyākhyā śailī, i.e., the way of exegesis. It consists of the explanatory

commentaries on the Sūtra literature. Technically these commentaries are called bhāṣya, tīka, tātparya tīka, etc. Together, they all constitute a huge corpus of Indian philosophical literature. They all exhibit the diversity, profundity, and subtle analysis of philosophical concepts of all the Indian intellectual spheres.

2. The term *Upaniṣad* is derived from the three Sanskrit root words- ‘upa’, ‘ni’, and ‘ṣad’, which literally means ‘to sit near’. In an Upanishadic setting, a disciple (śiṣya) sits near his master (guru). This symbolizes respect for the teacher. Through this setting the darkness of ignorance is dispelled away just by the light of Knowledge of the great statements about Ātman and Brahman. *Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* also serves the same purpose. The teachings based on *Upaniṣads* (also along with *Bhagavad Gīta* and *Brahmasūtra*) is also called Vedānta. It is best encapsulated in Mahāvākyas which denote the oneness of the Self, the world, and the Lord.



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